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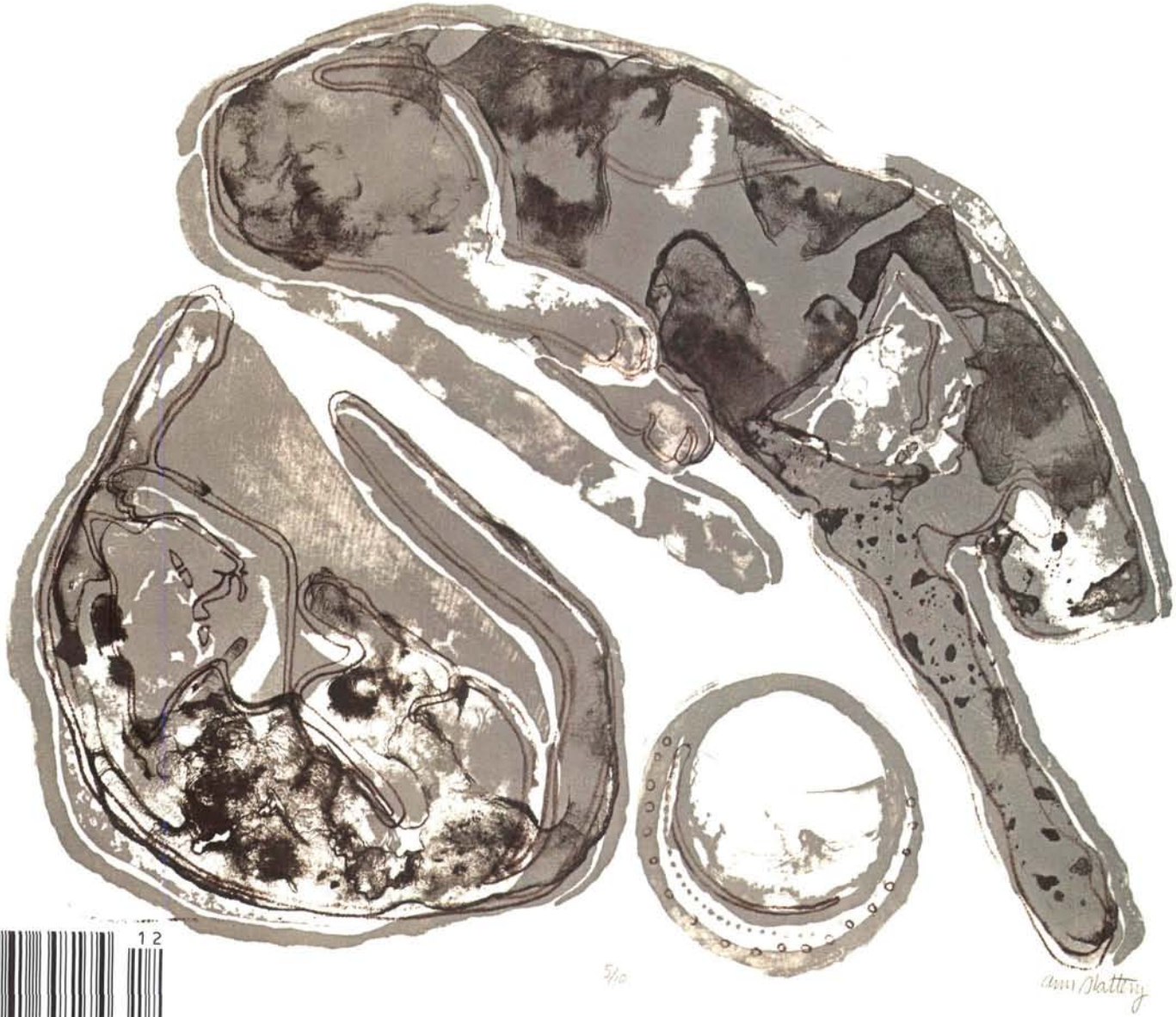

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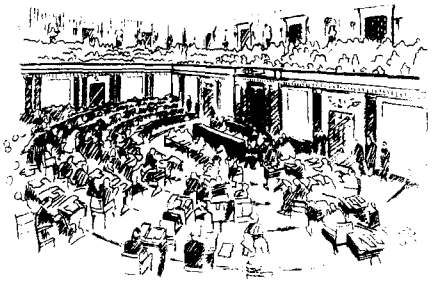

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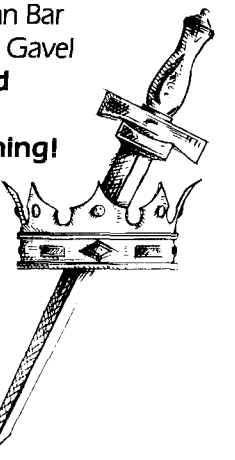

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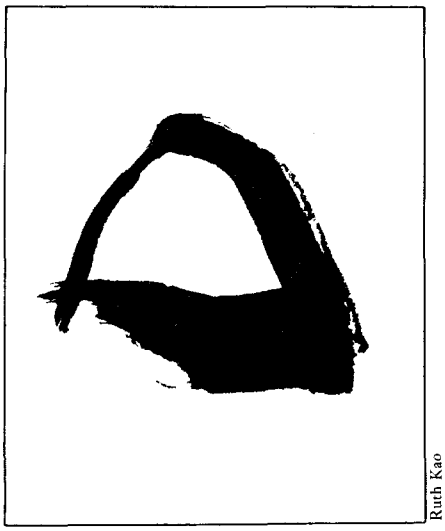
TWO ZEN INTERVIEWS

Rinzai and Obaku Masters

1. Rinzai Zen Master

Roshi Gempo Nakamura, master of Jishi-in, a sub-temple on the grounds of the important Rinzai temple Nanzenji in Kyoto, is a graduate in Chinese Philosophy of Kyoto University. Expert in Chinese literature, especially early Zen poetry, he is a disciple of the late Shibayama Roshi, one of the great modern masters known in the West for his writings and lectures—particularly in the United States, which he visited several times. Shibayama Roshi, who died in 1974, was once master of Jishi-in, and his tomb lies behind the temple. Gempo Nakamura studied with him many years, receiving *inka* (testimony to his enlightenment), one of few so honored by the master, another being Taigan Takayama, a co-translator of *Zen Poems of China and Japan: The Crane's Bill.* Shibayama honored these men, calling them his rarest disciples.

This brisk October afternoon, maples on the temple grounds beginning to take on color from the sun, I much look forward to my talk with Gempo Nakamura. Master of Jishi-in for thirteen years, since Shibayama Roshi left to serve as chief abbot of Nanzenji, he has tended it well, judging from the garden, one of the most renowned in Kyoto. Rocks placed harmoniously on raked sand, a touch of vivid shrubbery—so beautiful, it's no wonder many come to visit. Such places resemble in some ways colleges of Oxford and of Cambridge, a great temple like Nanzenji having a number of small temples circling its main building. The sub-temples use the large refectory in common, and the Sodo (meditation hall), each sharing the upkeep of a united whole. From them abbots are chosen to lead the main temple and, as with Nanzenji, its subordinate temples throughout Japan. Rinzai, one of the



Ruth Kao

three chief schools of Zen (the others being Soto and Obaku), has sects, the Nanzenji of Rinzai being one of the most important of these. One day Gempo Nakamura, as his master before him, may be chosen to guide the Nanzenji complex of temples and subordinate temples.

Before our meeting I wander through Jishi-in with a young disciple studying for the priesthood, who, in turn with fellow disciples, assists the master greeting visitors, and so on. He seems happy to be showing me the temple, his home for years to come, which he clearly loves, while I am awed by the openness of Jishi-in, whose garden can be readily viewed by all (most temples these days take entrance fees). The young disciple has been instructed to take me on to Shibayama Roshi's tomb, for which I am grateful. The dedication in *The Crane's Bill* shows our respect for the late master. His tomb, a simple white stone in the heart of the garden, is destined to be a pilgrims' resting place for Zennists throughout the world. Now I go in to meet Gempo Nakamura, whose welcome is informal in the large reception room overlooking the pattern-sanded garden. Slight, not too carefully shaven, like all Zen masters disciplined in movement, he begins preparing tea—among many accomplishments, he is an expert in this art. So we sip the aromatic tea, speaking casually of common friends. Now, he informs me, he is ready for my questions.

Stryk: As you know, I am interested in the different branches of Zen. Could you give me your idea of the three major sects?

Nakamura: The differences, alas, are better known than similarities: Rinzai's insistence on koan interpretation, its often misunderstood austerities, its indifference to scripture. Yet, like the others its chief concern is Zen itself. Really a matter of temperament, each offering a unique something to the seeker. The young, feeling need for what Zen offers, can in this day and age choose, and it's by no means uncommon for students to change sects—in midstream, so to speak. That is, begin with a Rinzai temple or monastery and, for whatever reason, on discovering its ways are not for him (or her: you know we have our nuns in Zen), can approach a master of Soto or Obaku, asking to be taught by him. Finding the right master, you see, may be the most important thing of all. Dogen spoke of the danger of dwelling on divisions, maintaining Zen itself the one concern. There—here I am, a Rinzai quoting a Soto master!

Stryk: What is your hope for those who come to train here?

Nakamura: That as the result of discipline they are able to live as Zennists—nothing less, or more.

Stryk: What does that mean to a young Japanese?

Nakamura: What it has always meant to young Japanese, always. Zen views, after all, are highly distinct.

Stryk: How many working with you are likely to achieve satori?

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Nakamura: As you've no doubt discovered, there's great reluctance to talk of *that.* What after all does it mean?

Stryk: You surprise me. What satori means is surely no secret.

Nakamura: Very rarely, however, do we think of it in an absolute sense, and I believe that's what you have in mind. Such awakening is the rarest thing in the world, now as in the past.

Stryk: But the literature is alive with accounts of satori. Surely that's the whole point of discipline. When a master gives *inka,* when you received it from Shibayama Roshi, there's a very definite experience in mind, is there not?

Nakamura: Yes and no. You see, one works under a master for years—there are many ways of demonstrating attainment. *Inka* is given only when the master is assured, over a long period, that transformation, sudden or gradual, has occurred. The literature you speak of—and I admit it tends to emphasize awakening—usually concerns a specific event, proper to such literature. But all those things which came before and happen after are, if anything, more important. The daily life of the disciple, the way he conducts himself in and out the temple, is everything. The master's always sizing up, quite unconsciously: the young man who took you to the roshi's tomb, for example, was, I'll confess, observed, Also *I* wanted to look at you before our meeting! In other words, not quite the drama the literature, especially all those anecdotes about sudden enlightenment, would make it seem. *Inka* is given after many years' close judgment and, yes, friendship. In giving it the master testifies in no uncertain terms a disciple's training has been satisfactorily completed, that in his judgment he is now able to teach himself. That's almost the prime consideration, for there must be successful transmission if Zen is to be kept alive.

Stryk: Very illuminating, even to one who has lived the literature for years! Attainment, whether leading to a clearly recognized satori or not, is measurable then?

Nakamura: "Observable" may be a better term. All involved in discipline gain immeasurably, and from the first days of training it is possible to determine who is likely to succeed. You must understand that only those showing great capacity for sacrifice and hard work are received for training in the first place. This may be during *sesshin,* a few weeks in the coldest and hottest times of year, when those not able to cope with the regimen are noticed and informed that they should not continue. Indeed only a few expect to give up their conventional life for temple or monastery. Yet things aren't as clear cut as all that. Often one unable to cope at first returns to find he can.

Stryk: And he is permitted to do so?

Nakamura: Of course—such people often make the best disciples.

Stryk: Was Shibayama Roshi a strict master?

Nakamura: The strictest, and we revered him for that. He encouraged us to think of Zen life as made up of two phases, the attainment of true self, followed by a life of service.

Stryk: Our friend Taigan Takayama would seem to be a good example, wouldn't he? I have in mind the way he serves his community together with his work as priest. I recall he is director of the council for social welfare of Yamaguchi, as well as that of the prefectural association for the protection of cultural properties. And to top it off he directs the Yamaguchi orphanage, on the grounds of his temple, Toshunji. I remember how dear he was to those children, a father. Then there is his great interest—one you share, I know—in Zen poetry.

Nakamura: Yes, Shibayama Roshi, all of us, were inspired by his dedication. Often Takayama returns for meditation in our Sodo. A remarkable man—who does not think himself that at all. Things of little merit, he always says.

Stryk: Is it usual for an enlightened man to come to his home temple for meditation?

Nakamura: For meditation, and friendship. Shibayama Roshi encouraged the practice. Without it one gets caught up in activities, forgetting gradually the primal experience which led to all in the first place. Taigan Takayama believes firmly in the necessity of zazen, at which he always excelled.

Stryk: Excelled?

Nakamura: Yes. There are differences even when it comes to so basic a part of our life. Takayama sat perfectly while a disciple; everything he did, the humblest task, was performed in the spirit of meditation. He lives as he does today, doing all those things you mentioned, because his meditation was deep and lasting. A true Zennist.

Stryk: Like Takayama, you are interested in the arts, especially Chinese Zen poetry. Could you give me some idea of the way the arts of Japan have been conditioned by Zen?

Nakamura: A tall order! Well, I know of your interest in Zen art, and am aware of the way most Westerners associate Zen and art. I would caution against assuming that the connection is absolute. Far from it. There's nothing intrinsically Zen in any art, in spite of the way some seem to reflect Zen principles. It is the man who brings Zen to the art he practices.

Stryk: I see, but surely some arts would not have developed as they did had it not been for Zen. Haiku, for example. Basho was profoundly Zennist, an enlightened man, and quite possibly for that reason haiku became an important art.

Nakamura: There is, to be sure, a strong taste of Zen in his best poems, and it's true he studied Zen with the master Butcho. Perhaps he best illustrates the point I'm making. He brought Zen to the art of haiku, which was well-established before he came onto the scene. It was not really there before him.

Stryk: It might equally be said, would you agree, that there was not true haiku before him? Surely, from Basho on, there's something characteristically Zen-like in the form itself. The greatest haiku contain the sense of revelation we associate with Zen, and there's compression, which resembles that of *sumie* (ink-wash) painting of artists like Sesshu.

Nakamura: Such art is the expression of Zen spirit, whether painting or poetry—and all types of poetry, tanka as well as haiku. Many haiku, those of its finest practitioners, have no Zen whatsoever. No, it is man who fills a poem with Zen. Always man.

Stryk: As that's a problem which most interests me, may we pursue it? I have in mind the various *do* (Ways)—*Kado,* the Way of Poetry, for

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example. As I understand, one follows a particular Way to the heart of Zen. For Eugen Herrigel it was the Way of Archery. Coming to Japan to learn something of Zen, he was informed the best way to grasp it might be through an art, working with a master. It seems he succeeded.

Nakamura: I'm familiar with Herrigel's book, it is very convincing, but you must bear in mind he was following his natural bent—since he was deeply interested in the bow. And of course he was fortunate working under one of its greatest masters. I would insist it was he who brought his growing sense of Zen to archery, for there's absolutely nothing in that activity itself which leads to achievement in Zen.

Stryk: Isn't that rather like the old question, Which came first, the egg or the hen?

Nakamura: I am being adamant on the point because I feel strongly Zen is done a disservice by the easy association many make, here as well as in the West, between it and the arts. The problem is more complex than one would suppose. I'm simply maintaining few works of so-called Zen art, including haiku and sumie, have true Zen. It's precisely the feeling that led Professor Awakawa to publish a few years ago his remarkable volume *Zenga* (Zen Painting) where he isolates the sumie that are true zenga, giving reasons, making distinctions. The same might be done with poetry and all other arts. Awakawa quotes, by the way, a fine story concerning one of the Kano School painters who would always tell disciples they must be in a constant state of enlightenment. One day, it appears, while the master lay sick in bed, though it was raining hard, his disciples came to visit. Suddenly the conversation was interrupted by loud singing in the street. "An interesting man," the master said. "Do you understand his state of mind as he walks singing in the downpour? *That's* how you should feel when painting." The greatest practitioners of the arts we're discussing were profound Zennists—none would deny that. It doesn't follow, however, that when a man lifts brush or pen he is automatically engaging in Zen activity. He may not be the kind to sing in the rain!

Stryk: What then if he is in fact a Zennist, meditating, following principles?

Nakamura: Wouldn't matter in the least—though perhaps it should.

Stryk: Thus it may be possible for one without knowledge of Zen, even antagonistic to it—I'm being very hypothetical—to produce a true Zen work, something perhaps superior to work of a practicing Zennist.

Nakamura: It happens constantly, though I must add at once that here in Japan, at least, there's little of what you call antagonism. We are not a dismissive people, except in politics! Nevertheless, it is certainly possible that one without active interest in Zen might very well produce a superior work.

Stryk: Could it then be truthfully claimed as Zen art?

Nakamura: Why? One knows at once whether work has Zen dynamism balanced by composure. One doesn't consult a biography to determine the artist's qualifications. There is *zenki* (Zen spirit) or there isn't, whatever the man calls himself.

Stryk: You put your argument strongly.

Nakamura: With good reason. Too many years such associations have been casually made, often by people who should know better. Ours is a distinct Way, its expression in any form unique, rare. Just as attainment is.

Stryk: It must be irksome then to hear people claim to have discovered the truth of Zen?

Nakamura: Irksome? Hardly. In any case I would have to know the people before passing judgments.

Stryk: Does the rebirth, East and West, of Zen give you much satisfaction?

Nakamura: As Shibayama Roshi's disciple, how could it fail to? You know how important it was to him.

Stryk: Yet you seem skeptical about the nature of Zen experience.

Nakamura: I am a teacher, my life work is to assure the spread of Zen, guiding others to its truth. The claims you speak of do not distress me, so long as those who make them benefit to some degree.

Stryk: That would be enough?

Nakamura: Considering what life is for most, more than enough.

Stryk: That makes the master's role very special, doesn't it? Like that of a psychoanalyst.

Nakamura: No, for we do not treat the ill. Our assumption is not that those coming to us need such attention, but that they seek as conscious beings something beyond self, thus finding the true self. There is an overabundance of analysts in Japan; we do not compete with them. You must bear in mind we accept for training only those who in our judgment are clear-visioned, able to train successfully. For the most part superior persons who might do well at most things.

Stryk: Superior? Surely they must feel some lack to take on discipline arduous as Zen.

Nakamura: Precisely, because they *are* superior. They feel restless, uncertain, things all feel—but they take action. What they seek, however, is not help with personal problems, of whatever kind, but a Way to truth which makes all such things unimportant. Until they know that Way they grope in darkness. Yes, what the Zen aspirant seeks is light.

Stryk: And sometimes it flashes suddenly before one?

Nakamura: More often it is a small light at the end of a tunnel, approached gradually, becoming larger, brighter as one nears.

Stryk: To the layman that sounds more like Soto than a Rinzai point of view.

Nakamura: Less a lay than Western misconception, I'm afraid. Zen seems so easily understood when such distinctions are made—Soto's gradualness. Rinzai's suddenness, Obaku's middle-of-the roadness. In reality there are no such distinctions, or at least they are not so profound as some assert. As I've said, there is only Zen, and the temperaments of those seeking it. I'm very much afraid most Western books on Zen, many of which, with Shibayama Roshi's help,

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". . . Another Man's Poison," the quarterly column by Kenneth Lash, will return to its accustomed space in the next issue of the NAR.

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I've read with care, too often stress dramatic differences. Simple, colorful, but far from truth.

Stryk: That's very humbling, especially to one who writes on Zen! My final question concerns something which interests us both so much, Zen poetry. Would you agree enlightenment and death poems of the masters, Chinese and Japanese, are the most important expressions in the literature of Zen?

Nakamura: I would indeed. Especially the death poems, which give the very essence of a life, a brush of wind, and are often pondered like koans by students of Zen. We have always learnt from them, they are infinitely precious. You are right to be interested in them.

2. Obaku Zen Master

Mampukuji, main temple of the Obaku Sect, set on spacious tree-filled grounds, unique for its Chinese style—in form and color—is visited by those mindful of architecture and the arts. Every worthy book on Japanese temple art has illustrations of its structures and wood sculpture, among the most illustrious in existence. Gemyo Murasei-roshi, 60, is abbot of Mampukuji, which has many sub-temples within its grounds, situated not far from Kyoto in Uji, a district famous for its tea fields. Founded by the Chinese master Ingen just over two hundred years ago, Mampukuji was the first Obaku temple and from the start considered foreign by Rinzai and Soto.

Knowing of my interest in Zen art, Murasei-roshi kindly takes me to the temple's Treasure House, where among other true treasures there are calligraphic scrolls by Ingen, impressive Bodhisattvas by great Kano School painters, remarkable sculptures in both metal and wood and, most moving to me, having always cared deeply for his work, a large collection of scrolls by Ike-no-Taiga, who approximately two hundred years ago trained in Zen here. The treasure house is carefully tended and a keeper is always present, assuring that no one touches this rare and fragile collection.

I have long known of Murasei-roshi as abbot, and editor of perhaps the most influential monthly dealing with, and entitled, *Zen*. The magazine has a circulation of around 3000 throughout the world. The master is deeply informed on all aspects of the philosophy, the magazine not confined to Obaku Zen. I have many things to ask, but first he takes me round the temple grounds, and as we stroll explains, points out a structure, stops to admire a view of the surrounding countryside. He loves the temple he has served for forty years, is overjoyed to see how much I value all he shows me. He is extremely vital, laughing easily. As we leave one building for another, he is greeted warmly, with considerable respect, by priests and acolytes, even laymen wandering about the grounds—all stopping to bow before him.

Many companies send employees to train as laymen under him and his assistants for a week or two, the purpose being to gain confidence and self-composure. It always pleases him to see them: he welcomes their interest in Zen, which is bound to do much good. He is here to serve all men, from every walk of life. I am impressed by his patience and kindness, but since he will soon have to meet disciples for *dokusan* (formal meeting between master and disciple), his most important work, for which he must always prepare mentally, he suggests we return to Ryokuji-in, which also serves as Zen Culture Center for Youth. Reaching his large office, comfortable, hung with scrolls, photos and testimonials, we are served tea by an assistant. After some easy conversation, he is ready to answer questions.

Stryk: You are aware that in the minds of most with interest in Zen, your sect is least considered. In the West, for example, though many know Rinzai and Soto, hardly anyone hears of Obaku. Does that trouble you?

Murasei: Why should it? We are here to serve the ones who come to us, and many do. It is inevitable, considering our history, that we do not reach as many as the other sects. That never troubles us.

Stryk: Some think of Obaku as an "in-between" sect, perhaps having in mind your use of koans and, what's more unusual for a Zen sect, your chanting of Nembutsu (invocation of the Savior Bodhisattva Amida). Though traditional in many ways, you avoid the scriptures. Could you comment?

Murasei: Well, that does appear to be our reputation, puzzling many, especially from afar. The reason for our strange ways? Perhaps we are trying to catch up—the others certainly had a head start on us! It is our purpose—a very well defined one, I may add—to reach many, using all methods to make that possible. I suspect *that* is what's behind the somewhat purist criticism often levelled against us.

Stryk: Some feel your sect too syncretistic, offering everything to all, thus perhaps losing individuality.

Murasei: The logic of that escapes me! In what sense lose individuality—there are surely many forms of individuality, even an amalgam has *that*. In any case, there you have the proof of their illusion: what after all is sect, what importance has it in the grand scheme of things? So-called differences are not as clear-cut, large as some might think—far from it. The greatest may be our use of the Nembutsu—which, by the way, we treasure. It helps establish a strong religious base— Zen after all is a religion, something which in their emphasis on disciplinary formalities others sometimes play down. If the chanting of Nembutsu makes us more popular in approach, less élitist, well, that's fine, the way it should be. We want to attract, and feel no shame about it!

Stryk: You do employ koan, of course, strictly as Rinzai?

Murasei: That depends on masters— some are strict, some less so, in both sects. Certainly we believe in the importance of koan in training, and we use the same koans, which after all are the possessions of no single sect.

Stryk: Rinzai masters take pride in their severity, in koan practice—are you personally thought severe?

Murasei: The young here seem to think so! Yet I dislike the word severe—very misleading. Strict, yes. In fact it is the greatest kindness to be strict in things designed to help. How easy to be lax, but it would defeat the purpose of the koan, which is meant precisely to keep a student on guard.

Stryk: Scriptures: do you avoid them as much as other sects?

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Murasei: I'm afraid I just don't know, never having made a comparative study. You must understand that, looked at from outside, sects might appear to differ as your questions suggest, but we are not—at least I am not—conscious of such matters. Far too busy! We don't recommend scriptural study since students tend often to rely on learning, thinking it a substitute for what is all important—inner growth. A master, on the other hand, whatever he says about those dangers, is likely to know the scriptures well, find inspiration in them. I certainly do, read them constantly. What's more, I'm expected to.

Stryk: In part due to your being editor of *Zen*?

Murasei: I don't think so, though many of our articles deal with scriptures. Consequently we have to know them well. No, I would be a student of scripture even if I were not editor of the magazine—which, by the way, is open to all sects, and read by all.

Stryk: When training were you cautioned against them?

Murasei: Not in so many words, far from it. They were simply not discussed much. It was made clear whatever truth the training would reveal was to be found in myself, not words, however exalted.

Stryk: How do you go about the problem with disciples, especially the studious ones?

Murasei: By making them know the necessity of concentrating on personal development, suggesting they spend less time—in some cases none—on reading. Meditation is everything, including and containing all that characterizes Zen. Like all sects we emphasize work in the zendo.

Stryk: Do Obaku Zennists meditate precisely the same way as others?

Murasei: Yes, but again depending on the masters. Some are traditional, more strict than others. As I've said, though I'm thought strict, I'm certainly not hard. We sit in lotus, and demand as much of ourselves as others. It is in the zendo rather than the library most important discoveries are made, hence we encourage very serious meditation.

Stryk: Like all masters, you give teisho (lectures): do yours differ from those of others?

Murasei: Of course—we don't parrot each other: unthinkable! In teisho a master distinguishes himself. I simply try to be myself, drawing from experience, the wisdom—if any!—I possess. My teisho are generally short, as most, their purpose to lead toward the awakened self.

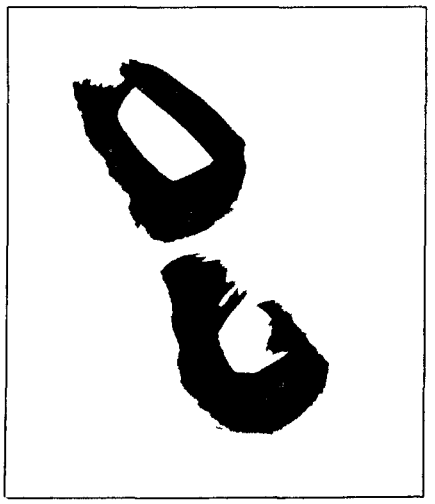
Stryk: Do you give teisho on scriptures?

Murasei: Not the whole of a scripture. Sometimes a sentence or two, a parable, rarely more. Mainly I lecture on ordinary things—the season, holidays, social ills, whatever interests me at the moment.

Stryk: As a lover of Zen arts, do you use Zen poems in your teisho?

Murasei: From time to time—an enlightenment or death poem, a great haiku. When, that is, I think disciples may be familiar with the piece. Few of them are literary types, you see. I have to be cautious about introducing unfamiliar material.

Stryk: I'm surprised. Surely some respond to poetry.



Murasei: A few, by no means all, and when I lecture it must be to all. Though there are some who have little to do with poetry, all are capable of appreciating insights of poetry, when pointed out.

Stryk: Do you prepare teisho carefully, using notes?

Murasei: I don't use notes because it's best to be informal at such times, yet I think well on what I'm going to say, as you might expect.

Stryk: From what you say, I gather there are great differences among disciples. Are some more competent than others? I ask because in other sects such things are dwelt on: great masters like Hui-neng seemed so élitist, claiming in no uncertain terms their Zen was meant for the gifted. Do you consider such things?

Murasei: I have great respect for the Sixth Patriarch, but what he said must be viewed in perspective. Zen was being formed in his time, indeed he was most instrumental in its rapid development in T'ang China. He must have felt a need to stress that Zen was meant only for those willing to make great personal sacrifice, the kind he himself had made. Thus when he spoke of the less-gifted he must have had in mind those incapable of gaining from Zen. He wanted to show the exceptional character of training, which is why he spoke of it being meant for the exceptional. When he is quoted in our time, such historical conditions are not borne in mind.

Stryk: Would Hui-neng have thought those who train with you exceptional?

Murasei: What matters surely is that *I* think them so! I cannot claim Hui-neng would think them so, but I believe Ingen, the founder of our sect, would have been pleased with them.

Stryk: Do you choose carefully? Are some rejected?

Murasei: Rejected? Those who come know great demands will be made on them. That's enough to discourage all but the most earnest. Yes, they are chosen most carefully, for their own good.

Stryk: Do most stay on, complete their training?

Murasei: If you mean for the priesthood, no, not all complete the training. Often things get in the way, personal things over which they have no control. Others find training too arduous, but we don't think of them as having failed, not at all. There are many things people do for which their training here prepares them better in one way or another.

Stryk: Could you explain?

Murasei: Whatever one decides, he will have benefited by serious training, whatever the duration. So long as the discipline has been carried on honestly, sincerely, whatever is

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done in the world will be to some degree affected—that's self-evident.

Stryk: Yet surely the point of training is to lead toward awakening, is it not?

Murasei: Ideally, but few are awakened, even among those entering the priesthood.

Stryk: All masters say that, but historically isn't that the purpose of Zen life?

Murasei: Awakening is easy—stimulating—to speak about; in the West dramatic satori experiences are always being discussed. We tend to be skeptical about that sort of thing—indeed consider it somewhat misleading, even dangerous. For one thing it can be very discouraging to be told the chief purpose of Zen life is awakening—very few, after all, have such experience, and those who do are most reluctant to discuss it. They're hardly expected to, through fear, I suppose, of expressing improperly what is, all know, wordless. That is, if real, it is overpowering in effect. Very few have the gift to describe such a happening.

Stryk: Whether or not one was capable of expressing what happened, could you tell if it had?

Murasei: I would like to think so. Occasionally I have observed dramatic progress which only sudden and great insight could have brought about. Yet such inward experience cannot be dealt with as, say, scientific discovery described in terms of formulas. One isn't suddenly possessed with the gift of tongue, however momentous the experience.

Stryk: Isn't that one of the major roles of poetry in Zen, expression of such insight?

Murasei: When one is a natural poet, yes. How many are? For some it would not be possible to write convincingly of anything, however consummate the event. That's the advantage lettered men have always had, why we value so highly the achievements of great masters like Dogen, Hakuin, and Ingen.

Stryk: Leading to the intriguing thought that there might have been many whose Zen experience was as profound but who could not express what happened.

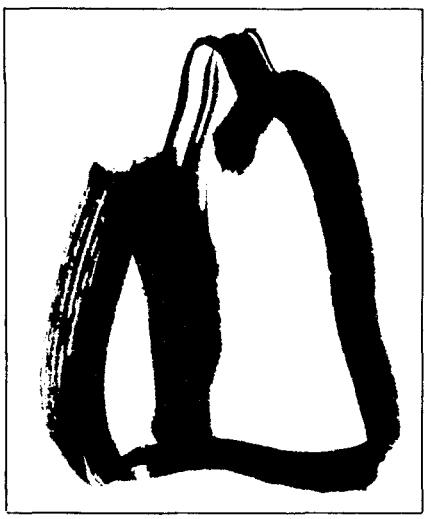
Murasei: That's always been the way, I'm sure.

Stryk: Yet, as you've pointed out, the master is able to determine, whatever his gifts of expression, whether a disciple is awakened. There would be change in him, even great change?

Murasei: To be sure, but such changes are rarely attributed to satori, even if the result of it. The disciples would not, for the most part, be disposed to talk about change in such terms. If asked about differences in behavior and attitude, he might simply say he has begun to glimpse the truth of certain things, or meditation has begun to enrich his insight—all quite normal, when you consider that's precisely the role of meditation.

Stryk: Once I might have thought such reticence to discuss satori due to sect, but having talked with Rinzai Zennists, I find all equally reluctant. I'm surprised: so much literature I've worked with stresses awakening.

Murasei: Yes, but bear in mind it deals with experiences of extraordinary men, those who in Christian-



ity might be deemed saints. You can't expect most of us to have equal experiences, or what is as much to the point—as we've observed—equal gifts of expression. In that sense, I suppose, the literature can be misleading as to what actually goes on in temples and monasteries—what always went on, even in the days of masters like Dogen and Ingen.

Stryk: For posterity it's obviously important that there are such men, in all cultures, but what has impressed me about Zen is that it has a number of *do*, or Ways, among them *Kado*, the way of poetry. Some of the other *do*, Judo, for example, are of course non-literary, yet it is possible through following such a Way—as in Judo classes here at the Ryokuji-in—for one to gain as much of Zen as through any other Way. That's unique to Zen. I've thought of it as something like a wheel, the hub being the truth offered, each spoke like a *do*. The spokes would have equal importance, all attached to the hub. Now it's that kind of thing I have in mind when asking how a disciple's progress can be judged.

Murasei: I don't teach Judo, I'm afraid! You are right, of course—one Way is as important as the next—all lead to truth of Zen. But you must know we do not actively encourage the pursuit of a *do*, feeling perhaps the most important Way is found in life as it is lived from day to day. There, too, you understand, one's progress in discipline is determinable—discovered in one's relationships, for example, and the manner one conducts oneself in everyday affairs, at the temple or in street. That may be the highest *do* of all, the very center of your hub.

Stryk: I can see why so many come to Mampukuji for training!

Murasei: Yes, it is true we want our Zen to reach to all. Perhaps we are more active than other sects in seeking followers, starting with Ingen himself. By then Zen was established in Japan, had been for 400 years, with two main sects. As you can imagine there was resistance to the founding of another sect, and by a Chinese priest at that. Ingen actively sought help, support, and gave our sect the basis for more popular appeal. But not, I emphasize, to win converts. He felt Zen had become too aristocratic, that it needed to attract the common people. It had after all something profoundly important to offer all, on all planes. That's always the ideal of Obaku, and today more than others perhaps, we attempt to attract laymen, offering meditation courses to workers, businessmen, any interested. We even have an active school for the young—that kind of thing. In fact, in summer the temple becomes like a youth hostel!

Stryk: And some who visit might find the way to Obaku?

Murasei: If not immediately, later. Many return in hope of having their lives enriched. We welcome them with open arms.

—Interviews by Lucien Stryk

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SUSPICIOUS ORIGIN

The first time Daryl sent his plan to the Mayor and did not receive a reply, he figured they had cocked up the mails again. They were all the time cocking up the mail because only deadbeats who wanted pay with no work got jobs like in the post office. So, just to be sure, the second time he sent three copies: to the Mayor again, to the Governor, and to the President of the United States of America. A month went by, but even after a week Daryl knew not one of the sons-of-bitches was ever going to send him so much as a "thank you." Guys like that don't want to hear nothing that makes much sense. He checked the newspapers to see if he could catch one of the sons-of-bitches claiming his idea, but he knew it was no use looking because the newspapers were in on it, too. Last year he had sent a letter every Thursday for six months and not one got printed so they were all in on it together. Anyone with eyes could see what was going on. It was goddam awful.

Elise had nothing to do with the plan's creation. He'd been pushing a rack with a sticky front wheel uptown on Eighth Avenue on a gray morning that dripped like his sinus when he'd passed her sitting in a doorway. There was something screwy about her because no hooker who works the Garment District sits, ever. Bad for business. She had a huge canvas tote bag stuffed to bursting. Her make-up was all wrong, too, especially the black eyeliner beneath her eyes. There's no percentage in trying to look older. Daryl figured her for a hooker, only dumber than most, and so kept right on going uptown with fourteen blue cloth coats. They sent him back downtown with an empty rack, which proved how stupid the wop dispatcher really was. He came to where the girl in the grimy white sweater was supported by the doorframe and he let the rack rattle off to a halt while he went to tell her what he told all the prosties.

Prosties looked at him funny. They grinned—especially the colored with the glistening red lips and white teeth—they grinned so they knew all his secrets and so he went right up to them and told them what he thought of them. But when he gave this one the business, she only stared through the vines of her stringy brown hair. She was different. Her enormous eyes were empty bottle green. Usually prosties shouted back at him. That made him feel good. He bought her good thick minestrone soup at a cafeteria because from inside himself he knew he had to. He never returned the rack and so ended his fifth job in as many months.

Elise told him her name, that she was fifteen, from

PERRY GLASSER is a New Jerseyite. This is his first published story.

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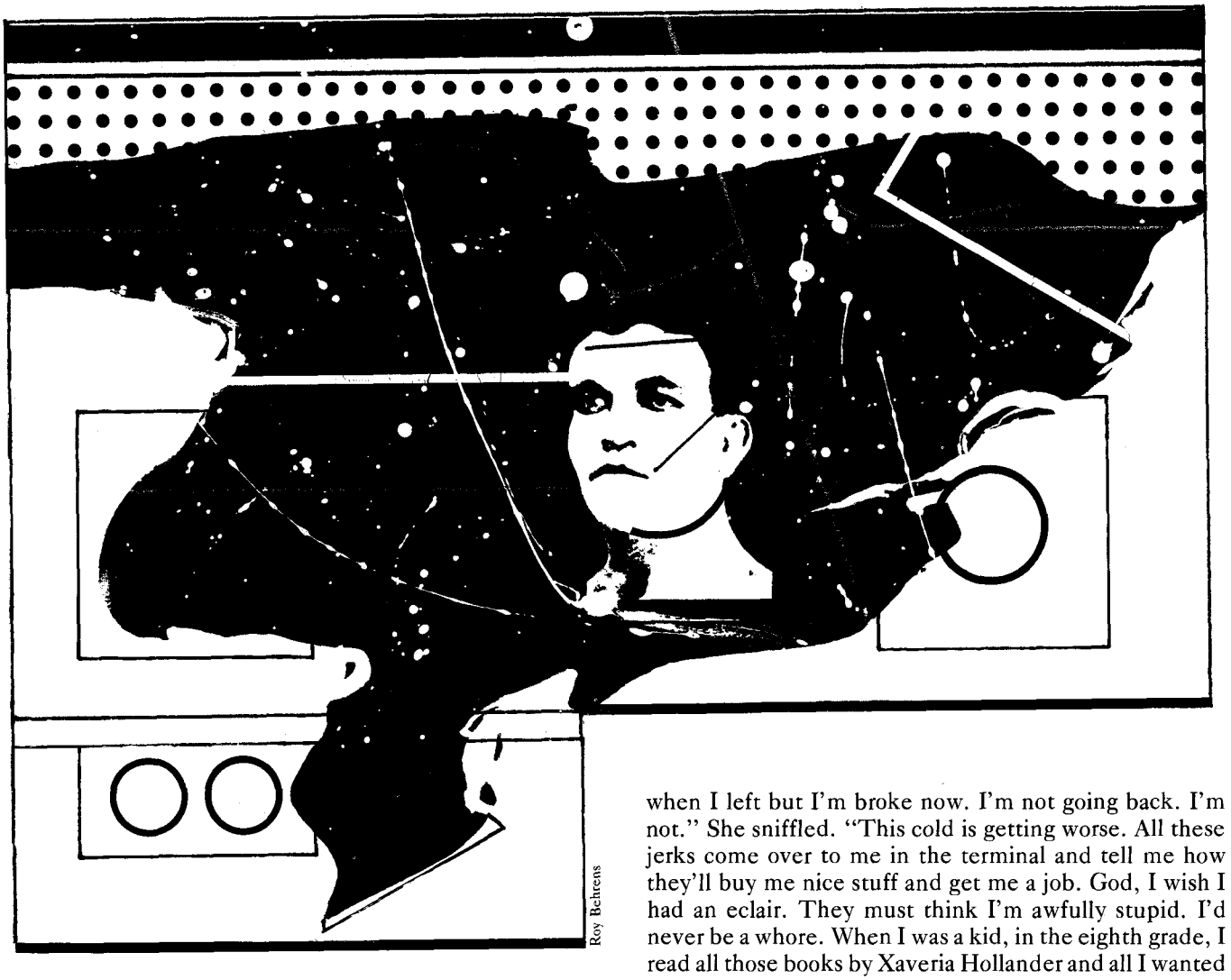
by PERRY GLASSER



Roy Behrens

Connecticut, and had not yet gone more than ten blocks from the bus terminal since she'd arrived in New York five days before. She'd lived with her aunt, a woman who said she was her aunt, anyway. Her aunt's boyfriend and her aunt had been getting it on again and this time they wanted Elise to try some tricks with them and so Elise had run away that night. She told Daryl all this in a matter of fact tone of voice through the soup's steaming vapors. Her nose ran. He watched her spoon the soup and thought she was a spy. It had not been such a good idea to send letters, after all.

"Where do you sleep?" he questioned.

"In the terminal. It's warm upstairs. I've been trying to get a job as a waitress but every place I go they talk to me a few minutes and then tell me to beat it."

"How do you eat?"

"I had forty-seven dollars and twenty-three cents when I left but I'm broke now. I'm not going back. I'm not." She sniffled. "This cold is getting worse. All these jerks come over to me in the terminal and tell me how they'll buy me nice stuff and get me a job. God, I wish I had an eclair. They must think I'm awfully stupid. I'd never be a whore. When I was a kid, in the eighth grade, I read all those books by Xaveria Hollander and all I wanted to do was be a whore but last year I saw this *true* show on TV. Did you see it?"

"I don't own no television. The box will rob your mind."

"Gee, no TV? Well, they showed how all prostitutes die and get beat up and stuff like that. So I don't want to be a prostitute. There's no future to it. Did you know that Mary Magdalene was a whore? The sisters told me that. Of course, they didn't use the word, but it is true, anyway. Jesus loved her. He loved all sinners." She chewed a cracker thoughtfully and blinked twice.

She could not be a spy. A spy would not sleep in a bus terminal. Spies slept in fancy places, like hotels on Seventh Avenue or even up on 59th Street. She could be lying, of course. That was possible. Spies were smart. But he didn't think she was smart. And who'd ever heard of a spy that wanted an eclair?

Elise chattered on. "This last guy said he'd call the police and report me as a runaway if I didn't go with him.

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Do you think anyone would be that mean? Well, I got right out of there and spent last night in that doorway where I got this stupid cold. I bet I'd have gotten a job soon. I washed everyday in the terminal's ladies' room. Give me some napkins." She took a wad from the dispenser, wiped her nose and eyes and stuffed the others into the tote bag. The top button had fallen off her sweater. Beneath the sweater she had on only a cotton yellow tee shirt. "I've been eating cinnamon jelly doughnuts all week for breakfast and lunch. Isn't that funny? Do you like cinnamon? You won't report me, will you?"

"No." He wouldn't. He liked her. Kids like her needed open space to grow up. The plan was for kids like her, too. He took a chance. "Want to stay with me for a while? Until your cold clears up, at least." Everybody has to take a chance once in a while. In the end they get you anyway.

She looked around and pushed some hair from her eyes. It immediately fell back to where it had been. "I don't know," she said. He looked at her. She was plain, round-faced and too heavy for her height. Her skin was the color of custard. She wiped her upper lip with the back of her wrist. "I don't know," she repeated and started to cry. People looked.

"Hey, now, cut that out. Cut that out, understand? You'll get me in trouble." He stood and leaned over the table and dabbed a soiled napkin at the tears on her cheeks. Women should never cry. They look like hell. Some turned it on and off to trap you, but she wasn't like that. "What the hell all of you looking at?" he snarled and turned his head left and right. People looked away. "I didn't mean nothing by it," he said to her. "Honest. Understand? For chrissakes, cut that out!"

She stopped.

"There, That's better. That's all right. I swear to God I didn't mean nothing by it. Understand? Nothing. Honest. Understand? I'm thirty-four years old for chrissakes and what the hell do I want with a kid of fifteen?" People all over the cafeteria looked again. "I ain't like other people!" he shouted at them and slammed his palms to the table. The salt tipped. He said to her, more softly, "I'm not. I got to preserve my strength for later." She started to laugh and anger flared fresh in him for a moment and then extinguished and he laughed too. It felt new. "That's better," he said. "There. That's good. See, we're laughing. I'm laughing. Come on, let's get out of here. The place is filled with creeps!" He grabbed her by the arm and headed for the revolving door. She stepped into it, but before he did, Daryl turned. He raised the middle finger of his right hand and pumped his arm up and down to all the diners. "Bastards!" he shouted and they ran easily to the subway, Elise's bag banging her hip.

At the right moment, Daryl vaulted the turnstile and Elise slipped beneath the arm. The subway doors shut behind them. They had been pursued but it did not matter because they had not been caught. "Trains belong to everyone!" Daryl bellowed to no one as the subway lurched uptown. They were crushed by featureless people. The heat choked Elise and the blinking lights confused her, but worst was the shrieking rush of noise which filled her with primeval terror. Daryl's sole concession to the subway was to stuff his red woolen cap into his jacket pocket. With one hand Elise gripped a pole and her bag, the fingers of the other clawed Daryl's forearm through the brown leather. He put his mouth to her ear and shouted, "Never been on the subway?"

She shook her head.

He smiled. "Something, ain't it? When I was a kid I used to ride between the cars. That was something. You can't do it no more. Piss off the sides in the tunnels. They changed the cars. They change the good things all the time!" He shouted it all.

She nodded to show she'd understood.

"I like you!" he shouted in her ear.

"Thanks! You're okay too!" It was true. She felt safe.

"What?"

"I said 'You're okay too!"

"That's good. That's real good!"

It was, too.

The train surfaced into light and for a time rode above the streets. At a stop Daryl hustled her off. They walked down a long flight of wooden stairs. Elise checked her bag, ruffling pink nylon things and a make-up kit. "Wait a second," she said. "Something is missing." She dumped the contents onto a step and poked through the tangle-ment. "Raggedy-Ann! Where's Raggedy-Ann?"

"What's the matter?"

"Raggedy-Ann isn't here! She's gone. Someone took Raggedy-Ann!" She began crying. "She was here last night."

"Did you look everywheres?" He put a tentative hand into the pile of soiled underthings, a box of tampons, an orange toothbrush, a tattered magazine, and a balled pair of clean sweatsocks. "What's Raggedy-Ann?"

"It's a doll. She's my baby! Raggedy-Ann will cry. She's lost now and will never get home. I know. Someone on the train must have taken her. They did. She'd never have left me. Someone took Raggedy-Ann!" She fell into his chest and her sobs slowly weakened.

"The dirty bastards. Don't worry, kid. We'll get even. The dirty bastards!"

The plan was so simple the strange part was that Daryl was the first to think of it. The time had come for all the bigshots to say out loud what everybody already knew. Daryl understood politics and that elected bigshots did nothing but plan on how to get re-elected, but there were some things that called for courage. Like Kennedy. There was a guy with balls, which was, of course, why they had to shoot him. It had to be said. The South Bronx was a total loss. The city had quit collecting garbage; stores were vacant; for a decade no one had spotted a fleet taxi. Even the Ricans who swarmed in the Bronx had thrown in the towel. Every night, when things got dull, they torched another couple of buildings and threw bricks at whatever firemen were stupid enough to show up. An alarm was always turned in as part of the celebration. But the firemen didn't give a damn either; they watched the buildings go up. Daryl had torched an empty building just to

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test himself. He'd turned in the alarm, too. It took the fire department twenty minutes to show and since Daryl had spilled gasoline on three floors the place was an inferno. They just stood and watched the building disintegrate. The fire was pretty and it was exciting to cause all that commotion, but the fire had not even made the local radio news. The heat from across the street was palpable on his arms. The people from the block brought music. They danced in the orange light. Nobody cared.

Now, everybody knows that buffalo are in trouble. So are whooping cranes. And wolves. And mountain lions. And flamingoes. And all other kinds of animals people never heard of because they keep the lid on important stuff. Some of them had been wiped out—like passenger pigeons. Daryl read it in a book in the library so it had to be true. He'd been patrolling one morning and during the lunch break he gave himself he'd dodged into a library and had picked up a book with all glossy pictures of birds and stuff. The pictures were pretty, so he had read some of the book and was shocked, shocked to discover that all those innocent animals were being wiped out by the stupid jerks who didn't think things out logical. The plan had, at that precise moment, been revealed to him in a flash—as were all his best ideas.

Level the Bronx and make it a wildlife preserve. Visions of vast, quietly powerful herds of buffalo grazing where Gun Hill Road had been wavered before his tear-filled eyes. Flamingoes looped over Yankee Stadium. Nobody, not nobody, would be allowed in for twenty years while all the animals got used to the Bronx. They should plant trees right at the start. Grand Concourse could be a dark forest. They planted all those trees in Israel, didn't they? They'd get some smart Jew for that part. Grand Concourse Wood. A couple of bulldozers and dump trucks and in a year or two the whole stupid Bronx could be returned to natural, the way it was supposed to be. Maybe, someplace, if they looked hard everyplace, in the places they skipped the first time, they might, if they were lucky, find the last two passenger pigeons—a girl and boy passenger pigeon.

He told Elise the plan on their third day and though she was not quite sure of it, she was swept away by the wave of energy he generated. When he finished she asked him to tell it again, especially about the flamingoes. He did, and when he came to the flamingoes they swooped and soared great wonderful pink circles against a perfectly blue sky. His face was transformed by the telling, much like the face of St. Francis in a picture book the good sisters had given her in the fourth grade.

Daryl's place was a single room on the fourth floor. Other tenants overflowed from their apartments onto the stair landings and sidewalk. No one paid rent. Inexplicably, the gas was still on and there was even intermittent heat. Bio-degradable odors seeped through the walls. Daryl had four deadbolt locks on the steel plated door. Bars criss-crossed the two windows which overlooked a bleak gray courtyard where a leafless tree struggled silently for sunlight. At night, Elise, as she lay on the couch, listened to the neighbors screeching. She undressed behind the ragged curtain Daryl had tacked into the plaster wall. It isolated the can from the rest of the place. The first night she'd luxuriated in unfamiliar nudity behind the curtain for a moment, put on one of Daryl's shirts, and came fearfully into the room. He was already curled on the bed with his eyes clenched shut. A khaki blanket and white pillow had materialized on the couch whose stuffing oozed from a tear in the left arm. She'd slept fitfully, expecting to be awakened. When she started from the noise in the night she listened to his steady breathing and fell back to sleep. He'd been gone in the morning and, unsure of herself, she stayed in the tiny room all day. Some light came through the two windows. The entire wall behind the bed was covered with cork. News articles, a Yankee pennant, a small photograph of an older woman and a man in an army uniform that might have been Daryl at eighteen, a Cutty Sark label, a subway map, a street map of the Bronx dotted with red and green marking pen, a framed printed signature photo of a very young Lauren Bacall, a brown woolen muffler, black horn rimmed glasses with no lenses and a bumper sticker with the letters "FTA" were pinned to the wall. Daryl reappeared at dinner time and opened a can of tomato soup. From within the leather jacket he produced a warm onion rye bread. They smeared big handfuls thick with soft butter and soaked them in the hot soup. He'd again gone to his bed early and later in the semi-darkness, when she was frightened, she'd slipped into bed with him. He rolled immediately to the floor. He looked funny in only jockey shorts. His legs were skinny, birdlike.

"What are you doing?" he demanded, looking up at her from the floor.

"I thought you'd . . ."

"I don't care what you thought. I told you before, understand? I don't do that. I'm not like other people. Don't do that again." He stood.

"But . . ."

"Don't try that with me. Understand? Never. It's no good. You understand. I don't want you that way. Nobody . . . You hear me?"

She moved permanently and happily to the couch. He made no demands on her and so she would do anything for him.

After he told her the plan, everything made more sense. It was good for her to have someone to take care of her. She no longer had to think. She had thought for too long, her aunt had seen to that, and each day had been a question of survival. She could rest now, because the plan was bigger than she was, too big to understand completely, and she could lose herself in it. What was good helped Daryl and the plan. What was bad, did not. It was good to be part of something bigger than herself. It gave her mission. She was infused with his spirit. The plan made little sense to her, but the plan was Daryl's and Daryl was good.

They started spending afternoons together. They'd take a train or bus a few stops and then they'd patrol a Bronx neighborhood. The people of the Bronx filled Elise with fear, but Daryl lashed back. He growled at boar-faced bus drivers; raised his finger to packs of black street youths who, amazed, howled threats at the clearly crazy white dude not worth pursuing; dumped trash barrels across the doorways of cynical Jewish shopkeepers; threw

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rocks at the vacant staring windows of abandoned brick buildings. She stayed beside him, always. Only the elderly, enclosed in sunlit patches of sidewalk, looked at them, and smiled.

Home, Daryl added a few green and many more red dots to the Bronx street map and he'd lie back and his eyes would glaze and he'd again tell Elise of the great buffalo herds and the forests and flamingoes. She asked him once about the other stuff on the wall.

"Nothing," he said. "That stuff ain't nothing," but the next morning the muffler and the photo of the woman and the boy that might have been Daryl were gone.

Everything else was the same, though.

They ran out of patience in November. To begin the demolition of the Bronx you want to be extra careful.

Daryl kept the black powder in manila envelopes in the closet while he drilled a hole through the center of each of the eight-inch pipes. The pipes were three inches in diameter and he filed one end narrower than the other so he could direct the blast. He fixed the fuse, a cherry bomb, through the hole he'd drilled. Epoxy held the fuse in place and sealed the hole. He capped one end of the pipe and was very careful pouring in the powder. He alternated a thick layer of powder with a tight layer of Red Cross cotton. The wadding made it easier to tamp everything more tightly. The greater the compression, the greater the concussion. The most dangerous part was screwing on the other end of the pipe. The slightest spark might be fatal. Daryl wiped the whole thing down with rubbing alcohol, especially the threads, and then waited for it to dry before he capped the second end. The hardest part was the waiting.

Elise cut styrofoam chips from coffee cups and dropped them into partly filled wine bottles. The styrofoam gelatinized in the gasoline and in a few days the contents expanded full. Wine bottles were better than soda bottles because the glass was thinner. They sealed each bottle with a tampon, which Elise thought was very funny, but acknowledged made good sense. They were absorbent and burned.

Four of the flaming Molotov cocktails in a semicircle around the narrowed end of the pipe bomb would work nicely. It was an inexpensive, effective incendiary device; the poor man's napalm.

They tested the first bomb on a Tuesday night before Thanksgiving. In an abandoned four-story corner building that might have once been a factory, they set one pipe and four bottles in the well of an incinerator. Daryl used a cigarette set in a book of matches as a timer, ignited the gasoline soaked tampons, and the two of them walked quickly from the building. Daryl wore the black frames with no lenses. Elise wore his red woolen cap over her hair. They'd chosen the building because two years before a nine year old boy had been abducted, bound, and tortured there for three hours. Daryl placed the newspaper clipping on the pipe.

They waited.

"The cigarette must have gone out," he muttered. They leaned against a clapboard house, trying to look nonchalant. Few people were in the streets. "I'm going to see what's what."

"Wait another minute."

It was cold, but Daryl's face beaded perspiration. Their breaths smoked. "Come on! Come on!" In the blue electric light he looked like a plaster statue.

"Relax."

"It must be out. I'm going back."

"Wait one more minute. To be sure." She struggled with him by holding both arms so when the blast came he toppled onto her and over his shoulder she saw the pillar of fire race up and through the center of the building, burst through the roof, and erupt angry flaring red against the night. They shook with it. He rolled off her and they saw the structure shudder, cave inward, and collapse. In two minutes it was fiery burning rubble.

"Jesus."

People tumbled from their houses, babies in their arms, screaming, hysterical, chattering Spanish. They pointed wild-eyed at what had been the building. Flames licked the night and vast quantities of oxygen were sucked from the air and, roaring, were consumed. Elise and Daryl sat where they had fallen.

"Look," he said. "Look at the fire. Like flamingoes. Look." His eyes widened at the sign. "Jesus, just look at that. Look at what we did. Jesus." Elise saw the flamingoes and looked at Daryl and saw only his face, like Constantine's at the Milvian Bridge. "No one's dancing this time. No radios this time," he said. His eyes and cheeks radiated reflected firelight.

They left before the firemen appeared.

Home, they were overwhelmed by fatigue and collapsed together onto his bed. They awakened, still dressed, at the same moment.

"Did we really do that?" Elise asked. Her head was on his chest, his arm across her breast. "Last night?"

"What are you doing?"

"Nothing."

"Well, get up." He quickly withdrew his arm. "No, I'll get up. We can't do stuff like this. We can't. We've got too much else to do now. I dreamed last night. I saw cities burning, people running, all screaming silent screams. Fire. It will happen." He floated in a circle around the bed. "Just stay on the couch, understand?"

"I'm sorry," she said. She did not know what she had done, but she'd learned it never hurt to apologize.

"That's all right. You're helpless. You're all like that. Instinct. But you can't have me. No one can. There's too much to do."

Daryl spent the afternoon at the table, aflame in a circle of window light. Elise watched him from the bed. He was beautifully intense. She did not stir, not wishing to disturb him. He cut a message one letter at a time from a newspaper demanding the evacuation of the Bronx in order to safely proceed with its destruction. It took a while because he wanted all the letters to be the same size. The note was dangerous, but what else could he do? They traced the mails. They had special machines. It was a chance.

On the radio they were calling the fire of suspicious origin. Elise liked the sound of it, so like Daryl.

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They ran out of luck just before Christmas with the fourth explosion. The fuse went out and Daryl had to go back because of fingerprints. He'd found no reason for the fuse to have gone out, although he wasn't really surprised. It was all only a matter of time and this was just the first sign that things would turn bad.

They were front page. Daryl read the papers to Elise. They had no leads to them but, then again, there was no real way to tell because everybody knew the papers only printed what the bigshots said they could. But he liked the name the papers had given him—the Bronx Bomber. It made him feel like a Yankee. "You should have seen the Mick when he had the good legs. He was something. He was beautiful, understand?" he told Elise. But he knew that once the papers were on them it was all just time until they were caught. It didn't feel real, but it was going to happen so they talked it over and agreed that the plan's survival was more important than their own. They wrote letters explaining the idea to all the newspapers so the plan would be public and people would see why they were doing what they did. But none of it got printed. Naturally.

"That means they gave the letters to the police and they'll match them to the ones I wrote to the Mayor and all. Those had my address. It's just time, now. Well, you got to take a chance once in a while," he told her. So that was it. That was the way it would end. He told her so she could leave before they found out about her. She said she wanted to stay and he said "Thanks" and they talked no more about it.

Soon after, one afternoon he tugged at her arm and made her walk past the door of their building. "Don't hurry, but keep walking," he hissed from the side of his mouth.

"What's wrong?"

"Don't look. Station wagons. New Plymouth station wagons. Both ends of the block. Too many new station wagons. It's them. There are too many people on the block. It's them. Has to be. Busy people. You never see busy people on this block."

"Who?"

"FBI. CIA. Something else. I don't know, understand? They're here. I'm scared, Elise. I'm scared. It was all for nothing."

"Where are we going? What will we do?"

"I don't know. Understand? I don't know. I'm cold. Keep walking. Oh Jesus, I am scared, Elise. Do you think they know what I look like? They're watching the apartment. They must know. They always know. They get pictures. Don't panic. Walk easy." He put his arm around her and the grip hurt her ribs. She said nothing.

They walked four blocks, heel-toe, heel-toe, quick, and the icy air burned their lungs. They walked with terror. Four blocks and stopped. Elise's nose was runny. They rode trains all day, talked of what was possible and what was not.

There was nothing.

Elise sat beside him on the train. He was magnificent. Late at night the train was empty and they clackety-clacked beneath the city, swaying, and he told her again about the trees and buffaloes and flamingoes. She slept on his chest. The train rocked. She dreamed of Raggedy-Ann.

Three black boys stepped on the train and surrounded them. They wore their colors; leather jackets painted with a blue, red and white geometric pattern.

"Man, what you got?"

"Give, man. What you got?"

Each had a single gold earring set in a hole pierced in his left nostril. The one on the left was totally bald. Elise hid her face in Daryl's arm but rough hands ripped her from him and they dumped her bag. One held her by the throat, choking.

"Punk nigger bastards. Little nigger punk bastards. Come on. Come on."

They did. Elise escaped to the front of the car. He was able to kick one and then they beat him. In the blinking light it looked like a flickering Chaplin comedy but she could not turn away as their arms rose and fell and rose and fell and rose and fell. The train jolted to a stop and they ran off. There was no one on the platform. She went to him and wanted to scream but would not because there was not time to scream and there was no one to hear.

He was on the floor. She knelt and cradled his head in her lap. Her cool fingers ran through his hair and his arm stretched away over the floor. His face was battered, blood bubbled on his lips, one eye was swollen shut. A scalp wound oozed over his left ear. He was conscious.

"They hurt me, Elise. They hurt me." He cried for a while and turned his face into her. "Did they bother you? They didn't bother you none?"

"No, Daryl."

"That's good. Come on. We got to get up." He stood, wavered, and fell into a plastic seat. "They didn't hurt me so bad. Bastards. I'll be all right."

"Let me get help."

"Can't. No." He held her wrist. "Our stop. Times Square. I'm okay. Really. Only sore. Nothing's broke. I can tell. They once taught me how to tell that."

He leaned on her and they staggered through the murky corridors. He gained strength. They were on a dark esplanade between track levels that ran from Sixth to Eighth Avenues. It was maybe four in the morning. There was no one.

"I have to rest," he said and they went to a hidden dark alcove between a newsstand and the wall and they slid to the floor and she again cradled his head. His breathing became less ragged. She wiped his face with the sleeve of her sweater dampened with saliva. Elise cried. They sat an hour and no one passed. Her shoulders shook and she cried softly because everything had gone wrong and she felt stupid because she had believed that all things were possible. He lifted his head and kissed her on the lips to stop her crying and then he was kissing her hard and there was no stopping him. He took her there on the concrete floor. He took her hard, entered her brutally, urgently, his hands tearing at her chest and neck and hair. Her clenched fists beat his back and shoulders but she really didn't care and did not know if she hit him to make him stop or urge him on. They cried afterward because for a time they had been special and now they were not. □

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WALTER McDONALD

WELL I'LL BE DAMNED,

he says. The second jury summons in a year.
What do they think I am, retired? I can't afford
another week. He shakes his head.
Turns back to his office. Stops
and sips his coffee. Goes in and shuts the door.

Mark and Maureen run a pharmacy. Take turns
at the store, and home. Someone has to be
with Joel. Maureen always wanted children.
Intended to have four. Tried to be good.
Obeyed her doctor. Took faithfully the prescription
from their own pharmacy: thalidomide. Joel
has *no* arms, *no* legs, *no* penis. An active
mind. Seal-like: a torso and a head.
After his birth, Maureen had a hysterectomy.
Mark, a vasectomy. Taking no risks.

Kyle is a doctor. Three children. For sixteen
years his wife died in their home. M.S.
Unconscious the last eight months. Within a year
he took another wife, plain, an old friend, perfect
as a mother for his kids. Two left home within
a week. The youngest calls the new wife "Ma'm."
Sometimes shakes her head. Cries at night. Cuts
school. Sits in the park all day. Kyle
is a doctor. Takes care of people's pain.

Four houses down from us the Jenners live. Or used
to live. The wife last week drove toward her parents'
home in Idalou. The children rode in back. She may
have, angry, reached to swat them. And lost control.
Or only a blowout. No one knows. Only that the car
jerked down into the median, rolled twice, stopped
on the opposing highway on its wheels. The cattle truck
smashed over the hood, sliced off the top
and Jane Jenner's head. Dragged the crushed car
a hundred yards. The car tank exploded first. Both
truckers lived. The diesel tanks burst into flames.
The men crawled under the fire and tried opening
a door, a window, anything. They saw a bloody
torso. Blood-splattered kids. Eyes pleading louder
than screams. Both tried until they caught on fire.
Ran desperately away. Some people knocked them down,

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rolled out the flames. Most of the cattle
burned. The smell of diesel fuel. The stench
of burning tires, of cows. And something else.

Ray and Nadine retired at sixty-two. No children.
Took tours to England, Paris, Rome. The Holy Land.
In Spain Ray had his first small stroke. Next spring,
they cruised the Caribbean. Back home, at sixty-six
they worked two months assembling three-thousand slides,
splicing five-thousand feet of 16 mm movie film.
Invited friends to come and see. The Bates declined,
infirm. The Woods were out of town. A dozen others
had lost mates, didn't feel up to fun. The new young
couple next door stayed an hour, the man checking his
watch. Next week Ray bought tickets for the Orient.
In Singapore Nadine suffered an insulin shock.
Back home, Ray had another stroke. Could only move
his eyes. Nadine showed movies on the ceiling.
After a week, Ray closed his eyes when she turned on
the film. Had seen enough. She nursed him for three years.
Died suddenly one day out shopping in the Mall. Police
found Ray in bed and moved him to a nursing home.
It took Ray four years more to die.

Carl and Lucille were college sweethearts. Practical.
Waited three years to marry. After graduation, waited
three more, saving, then bore a child. Three more
to have a second child. Beautiful frail girls.
Their skin almost transparent. The first
lived to be four. A rare disease, transmitted through
their blend of genes. The second died at three. Carl
and Lucille went celibate for years. Considered divorce,
and suicide. Went to psychiatrists. Lucille wrote
three-hundred letters to newspapers, warning young
people not to marry, to have no sex. None of her letters
published. Carl had cancer of the lungs at forty,
welcomed it as penance. Lucille looks no one
in the eye. Wears no make-up. Tries to look
old. Looks forward to menopause. To death.

In Bangladesh infant mortality is one in two;
life expectancy is twenty-eight. Names: Bangladesh,
Uganda, Ghana. Statistics have no arms, no legs.
A torso and a head. A world of pharmacies and disease.
Thousands of movie feet. A child sits in a park.
Sometimes shakes her head. The truck sliced off the
top. The stench of burning tires. And something else.
The jury deliberates. Looks no one in the eye.
Wears cancer like a curse. Wants to be damned.

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BEYOND ECOLOGY

Self, Place, & the Pathetic Fallacy

It is a matter of considerable concern to me that the sector of society we designate as the Arts and Humanities seems to play so minor a role in the environmental movement. There are notable exceptions, to be sure. People like Allan Gussow, Eliot Porter, and Ansel Adams have probably had a discernible effect on public conscience and consciousness. But most commonly the environmentalist is thought of as someone with a background in the natural sciences. This is unfortunate, I think, and explains in part the one-sidedness of environmentalist arguments and their tendency to contain the seeds of the movement's destruction. Failure is inevitable because of the movement's willingness to address the developer's perpetual question: "What good is it?" Accepting the validity of that question entails denying the validity of the preservationist movement.

I recall one incident which seems to me to illustrate the self-destruct mechanism built into the conservationist cause. About fifteen years ago, I was sitting at a long cafeteria table with some other biologists. We were discussing with righteous indignation the proposal that a railroad be built through Wood Buffalo National Park in northern Canada. This line would have run through the nesting ground of the only remaining Whooping Cranes, of which there were only about 18 at the time. It seemed utterly unbelievable to us that anyone could even suggest such a scheme. But we were brought down to earth rather abruptly when someone sitting at the same table, who had been forced to listen to our tirade, turned to us and said "So what—what good are Whooping Cranes?" What annoyed me most was that, for the life of me, I couldn't think of a single use for Whooping Cranes. They don't sing or eat harmful insects—you can't even claim them as a tourist attraction. Instantly, because our entire justification for existence of non-human nature was based on utility, our ability to defend the Whooping Crane disintegrated. To justify the birds, we had to fall back on—dare I say it?—*subjective* arguments, the kind a forester recently condemned as "burdened with sentimentality and impractical attitudes toward natural resource use."[1]

But to some, the conservation movement along with its in-built argument for utility seems to have been made viable again by the higher profile of Ecology. Ecology, they would argue, shows us that we can't do as we wish without paying a price. All of nature has utility, all is important. Hence Ecology, the "subversive science," seems to give much-needed support to the cause of the preservationist. And so it does, to a degree. Yet the "ecology movement" shares the same self-destructive embrace of the utility argument, and inevitably the demand arises for Ecology to *solve* the problem. If we can't proceed with a certain development without undesirable consequences, then obviously it is the role of the ecologist to find a way for us to proceed with the development while avoiding the consequences. Ecology, in general, is about as subversive as the Chamber of Commerce.

But there is, I think, a sense in which Ecology truly *is* subversive, and in which it both supports the preservationist movement and the role of the artist in that movement. The really subversive element in Ecology rests not on any of its more sophisticated concepts, but upon its basic premise: inter-relatedness. But the genuinely radical nature of that proposition is not generally perceived, even, I think, by ecologists. To the western mind, *interrelated* implies a causal connectedness. Things are interrelated if a change in one affects the other. So to say that all things are inter-related simply implies that if we wish to develop our "resources," we must find some technological means to defuse the interaction. The solution to pollution is dilution. But what is actually involved is a genuine *intermingling* of parts of the ecosystem. There are no discrete entities. As Paul Shepard described it in one of his many fine essays, the epidermis of the skin is "ecologically like a pond surface or a forest soil, not a shell so much as a delicate interpenetration."[2]

Ecology begins as a normal, reductionist science, but to its own surprise it winds up denying the subject-object relationship upon which science rests. Ecology undermines not only the growth addict and the chronic developer, but science itself.

At the outset, there seemed little enough risk. Biology has had to contend for years with relationships that contradict the assumptions of discreteness so important in its own taxonomic systems. Evolution itself was a severe blow to the pigeonhole mentality; it's very discouraging to have your species go and change on you after you get them all neatly labeled. But then there were the symbionts, the creatures that habitually co-exist in such close association as to make it difficult or impossible to deal with one without simultaneously dealing with the other. What do you do with creatures such as lichen, composed of two kinds of organism (and not even closely related ones at that)? The algal component provides photosynthetic ability, the fungal component structure and nutrient uptake. The two are mutally dependent on each other. What is a lichen? A plant? A co-operative? And what about colonial

[1]Newby, F.L. "Man-Nature-Beauty: A Research Dilemma." IUFRO-Kongress, München, 1967, papers VII, Section 26: 227-238.

[2]Shepard, Paul. Introduction: "Ecology and Man—A Viewpoint," *in* Shepard, P., and D. McKinley (eds.). *The Subversive Science,* New York, N.Y., Houghton Mifflin, 1969.

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organisms, in which different individuals perform different functions so that the community as a whole persists? Is the Portuguese Man-of-War an animal or a colony of animals? Where do you draw the line?

The situation has gotten even more confusing in recent years. Until now it has at least seemed safe to assume that whatever is with a cell belongs to that cell. But now it appears that the chloroplasts within the plant cell behave quite independently of the rest of the cell, and may originally have been separate organisms, like the algae and fungi in lichen.[3] That is to say, what we take for granted to be a single organism controlled by a single set of genes may in fact be more properly thought of as a very dependent kind of symbiosis, a mutualism in which the fate of two (or more) organisms has become so incredibly intertwined as to make them appear inseparable. Is a plant a plant, or a system of formerly independent creatures?

But still more disturbing to the particulate mentality is the fact that even humans seem to share this kind of ambiguity. It has been known for years, of course, that the bacterial flora of the intestine are essential for our survival. But it now appears that some of the organelles in our cells are quite as independent as the chloroplasts. Mitochondria, it turns out, replicate separately and independently of the cells, and are made up of RNA that is quite unlike the RNA of the cells. Apparently the mitochondria move into the cells like colonists, and continue their separate existence within us.[4] And what does that make man? Do we also merit colonial status? But perhaps that seems like mere semantics. What difference does it make that the parts are not what they seemed, so long as they act as an isolated organism? But is it isolated? Perhaps not. In his fascinating review of current bacteriological research, Reanny has outlined the difficulties that have arisen with the realization that mammalian evolution could not have occurred as rapidly as it did by mutation and natural selection alone. There must have been some sort of speeding-up involved, possibly through mechanisms that permit different expression of the genes without having to wait for gross changes in the genes themselves. That is, the genetic keyboard could remain about the same while different selections were performed on it. Such a phenomenon is now known to occur in bacteria. There are "extra-chromasomal elements" that can perform the role of cellular conductors, orchestrating new and resistant strains of bacterial cells to combat the extravagant barrage of antibiotics that flow from the pens of willing medical prescribers. But perhaps the more significant part of this fascinating phenomenon is that these are *extra*-chromasomal elements. They are not a part of what was traditionally regarded as the control center of the cell. They are independent. And they are transferable. That is, an extra-chromasomal element from one cell can be transferred to another. This means that a new evolutionary advance can be spread throughout the population very quickly, without waiting for natural selection. Creatures can "infect" each other with evolutionary transformations. And finally, most remarkable of all is the fact that these elements appear to be transmissible not only between individuals of the same species, but between species as well. This means it is conceivable that groups of species, perhaps even whole communities of organisms, could, in a sense, co-evolve. They are all quite literally inter-related.

And so we return again to the subversive tenent of Ecology: inter-relatedness. But, I emphasize again, it is to be taken quite literally, not simply as an indication of causal connectedness. Where do you draw the line between one creature and another? Where does one organism stop and another begin? Is there even a boundary between you and the non-living world, or will the atoms in this page be a part of your body tomorrow? How, in short, can you make any sense out of the concept of man as a discrete entity? How can the proper study for man be man if it is impossible for man to exist out of context? For the ecologist, then, the desire of some in the humanities to deal only with the fragment of reality they term "human" is nonsense.

The social sciences are especially prone to act as if there was a discrete entity of all-consuming importance called *man*. In what I doubt is an isolated incident, one social scientist who had recently joined an environmental studies department was heard to express great surprise that some members of that department were studying natural ecosystems rather than cities and human populations. Even in psychiatry, the social environment is given almost exclusive attention. So far as I know, no recent contributions have been made to the promising start made by Harold Searles in 1960.[5] Searles emphasized the dangers of ignoring the non-human portion of the environment and man's relationship to it. He claimed that a disproportionate number of his schizophrenic patients came from homes in which they were denied the chance to relate to material things. This is not to suggest that such a dependency on the non-human is pathological, but rather that the schizophrenic cannot afford to ignore, as most of us do, the fact that the material objects in one's life are an emotionally meaningful part of it. But even if a start has been made by writers such as Searles, Cobb[6], and Shepard[7], the significance of the concept of relatedness to the non-human seems to escape even those who would consider themselves conservationists. It is much easier for us to think in terms of anti-pollution campaigns than to contemplate a fundamental error in our set of cultural assumptions. Allied with this mania for believing in totally separate packages is our tendency to regard experience too as a set of separate factors, some of which are labelled "stimulus" and others "response." This in turn leads to some very unfortunate misunderstandings. Take the case of our current interest in landscape aesthetics, for example. With no discernible leadership from the arts, the scientists and planners have attempted to use their traditional tools—fragmentation and measurement—to describe the aesthetic superiority of one piece of landscape over another.[8] The assumption is that there is something

[3]Thomas, Lewis. *Lives of a Cell.* New York, N.Y., Bantam, 1974.

[4]Reanny, D. "Extrachromasomal Elements as Possible Agents of Adaptation and Development." *Bacterial Review.* 40: 552-590. 1976.

[5]Searles, Harold. *The Nonhuman Environment in Normal Development and in Schizophrenia.* New York, N.Y., International Universities Press, 1960.

[6]Cobb, Edith. *The Ecology of Imagination in Childhood.* New York, N.Y., Columbia University Press. 1977.

[7]Shepard, Paul. "Place in American Culture." *North American Review,* 262: 22-32. Fall 1977.

[8]Arthur, L.M., T.C. Daniel, and R.J. Boster. "Scenic Assessment: An Overview." *Landscape Planning* 4: 102-129. 1977.

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physical "out there" which, when seen by us "in here" produces a pleasurable effect. Obviously, if we can learn to identify and measure those physical factors that lead to the desired effect, we will have a charming new technique to use in environmental impact assessments and cost-benefit analyses. The result, predictably, is a kind of glorified Neilsen rating for nature, which threatens to help legitimize the further homogenization of the landscape by encouraging preservation of the currently popular while the less favored areas are consumed behind cosmetic barriers. Nowhere in the current literature do we find a conception of aesthetics adequate to permit the inclusion of such writers as Edith Cobb.

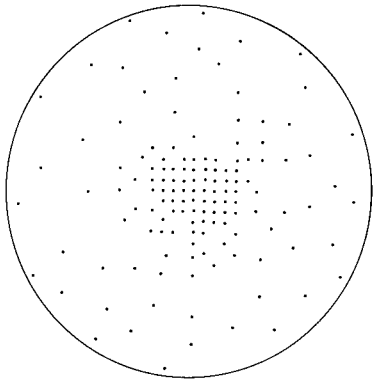
Cobb speaks of the child's relationship to the natural world as being basically aesthetic. This would be quite meaningless to current landscape researchers who presume a strictly formalist view of aesthetics. But this is a far cry from what Cobb has in mind. In contrast, Cobb's is a world of interactions, much more in line, I think, with the aesthetic theories of John Dewey than with the assumptions of those currently declaring interest in environmental aesthetics. The aesthetic expeience, in Dewey's terminology, lies in the relationship between the individual and the environment, not simply in the object viewed, nor in the mind of the viewer. Rather than a subject-object relationship in which the observer parades before the supposedly beautiful view, we have instead a process, an interaction between the viewer and the viewed, and it is in that joint association that the aesthetic experience lies. Instead of a detachment from the environment, we have a subtle diffusion into it. This concept of aesthetics makes perfect sense if one recognizes that strict categories are an abstraction, not a reality.

Similarly, the question of the role of the environment in the life of the individual is now transformed. Rather than thinking of an individual spaceman who must slurp up chunks of the world—"resources"—into his separate compartment, we must deal instead with the individual-in-environment, the individual as a component of, not something distinct from, the rest of the environment.

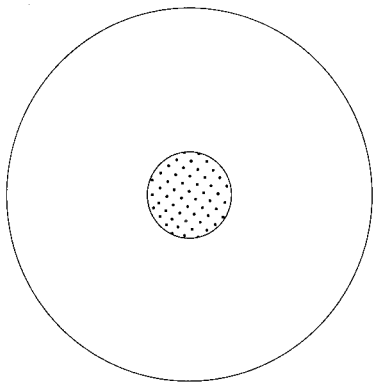
Which brings us back again to the question of interrelatedness. What evidence have we of the relationship between organisms and their environment? Are there demonstrable instances of substantial involvement of an individual with a total environment? There is at least one well-known phenomenon which indicates a strong affinity to a particular place. I'm speaking of "territoriality," but I have no interest in the routine description of it. Instead, I want to approach it from an aspect denied the scientist. I want to ask what it *feels* like to have a territory.

Let me remind you of one of the common examples, that of a small fish called a cichlid. Normally, size is of considerable importance—the big guy usually gets his way. But when the breeding season comes along, strange things start to happen; size does not necessarily prevail. It appears that once a small fish has established himself in a territory, he goes quite mad. That is to say, he does not appear to behave rationally. He doesn't seem to respect size at all. He even seems to forget what an insignificant specimen he is, and will attack a much larger intruder.

In short, it's as if he thinks he is as big as his territory. It's as if his boundary of what he considers to be "himself" has expanded to the dimensions of the territory itself. The fish is no longer an organism bounded by skin—it is an organism-plus-environment bounded by an imaginary integument. The boundary isn't a sharp one, but rather is a gradient. The further you get from its center, the less willing is the fish to attack. It's as if there is a kind of *field* in the territory, with the "self" present throughout but more concentrated toward the center:

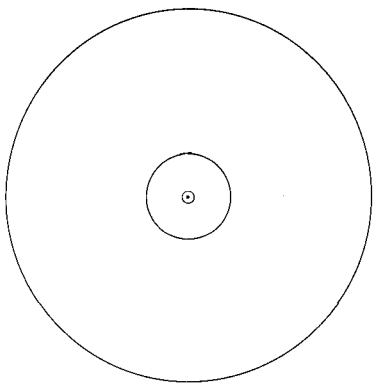


This is in striking contrast to the "normal" state of affairs, in which the fish is *non-properterian* and regards itself as bounded, more or less, by the skin itself:



In this case, there is more clearly an individual and an environment.

Now, to take the admittedly precarious step of assuming some analogy, if not homology, between humans and more demonstrably territorial animals, there is an additional phenomenon that becomes immediately apparent. Since Descartes, westerners have been content to take the illustrated procedure a step further. Not only are we not a part of an environment, we are not even part of a *body*. We, the "real" us, is concentrated in some disputed recess of the body, a precious cocoon, separate from the world of matter. Far from extending our "self" into the environment as the territorial fish does, we hoard our ego as tightly as we can.



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This brings up the question of what we really mean when we speak of man/environment relationships. F. Sparshott has suggested[9] there are several kinds of relationship possible: I-Thou, subject-object, user and used, and so forth. But the only one that is really relevant to a discussion of man and environment is *the relation of self to setting.*

Given this, one who looks on the world as simply a set of resources to be utilized is not thinking of it as an environment at all. Such a man is, according to Sparshott, "blind to all the aspects that make it an environment." The whole world is simply fodder and faeces to the consumer, in sharp contrast to the man who is in an environment in which he belongs and is of necessity a part. The tourist can grasp only the superficialities of a landscape, whereas a resident reacts to what has occurred. He sees a landscape not only as a collection of physical forms, but as the evidence of what has occurred there. To the tourist, the landscape is merely a facade, but to the resident it is "the outcome of how it got there and the outside of what goes on inside." The resident is, in short, a part of the place, just as the fish is a part of the territory. And his involvement with that place is, I think, an aesthetic one in the sense that Dewey and Cobb use the term. And perhaps also in the sense in which Northrop Frye uses it when he claims that the goal of art is to "recapture, in full consciousness, that original lost sense of identity with our surroundings, where there is nothing outside the mind of man, or something identical with the mind of man."[10]

We might deduce from this that what the landscape artist is doing is giving us an understanding of what a place would look like to us *if we "belonged" there,* if it were "our place." The artist is not doing landscape paintings; he is doing landscape *portraits,* or place portraits. And, just as the serious portraitist attempts to capture the essential qualities of his subject, qualities which would otherwise be known only to the subject's friends, so the landscape artist gives us a glimpse of the character of the land that would otherwise require long experience to achieve. The artist makes the world personal—known, loved, feared, or whatever, but *not neutral.*

We achieve, then, the sensation of knowing, the sensation of being part of a known place. Perhaps it is a cultural simulation of a sense of place. Whether or not the attachment of humans to place is indeed homologous to territoriality in other animals is not of great importance here—although it is suggestive that such things as territoriality, social hierarchy, and imprinting, along with the ability to personally identify with and remember what is going on in the environment, are functions of the ancient limbic system which we share with these other creatures.[11] It is sufficient that it serve as an analogy for the kinds of attachment we do form, and perhaps for the activities of the serious landscape artist. In other words, there appears to be a human phenomenon, similar in some ways to the experience of territoriality, that is described as aesthetic and which is, in effect, a "sense of place," a sense of knowing and of being a part of a particular place. There's nothing very mysterious about this—it's just what it feels like to be home, to experience a sense of light or of smell that is inexplicably "right." I sometimes imagine that it is also the experience that inspires the homing pigeon to its incredible accomplishments. The scientist, of course, is only permitted to ask the bird how he does it, not why, and certainly not what it feels like. But the salient feature of the phenomenon is not whether the subconscious act of navigation is dependent on stars or magnetism or polarized light, but that the bird must move to correct the tension it feels when it finds itself "out of context." It moves to correct its feeling of placelessness, a defect that will only be corrected when it reaches its roost. The bird is carried by a swirling mental vortex toward the center of the vacuum left by its displacement from its place in the environmental collage, to that small slice of environment in which it fits *and by which it is defined.*

The assumption that there is such a thing as a sense of place brings to light some strange anomalies in our current lifestyle. For instance, we must ask ourselves whether it is truly possible for any creatures in a state of sensory deprivation to form genuine attachments to place. What is the experience one has of an urban environment? What do we see? What do we smell, or hear? Contrary to those who praise the complexity of urban life, I must insist we take seriously Kvaløy's distinction between the complex natural environment and the merely complicated urban one.[12] The environmental repertoire is vastly diminished in urban life, perhaps to the point of making genuine attachment to place very difficult—even assuming a person were to stay in one place long enough to make the attempt at all. In lieu of the opportunity to form a relationship to place, the urbanite is easy prey to the advertisers who promise an easy surrogate, a commercial sop to his need for place, both social and physical. He is encouraged to accept the social place that comes, free of extra charge, with the commodity in question. But an automobile is no real substitute for physical place, no adequate extension of the self, or one so limited in potential as to hopelessly limit the emotional repertoire of the symbiont. What *does* make sense, however, is something that most in our society could not take seriously: animism. For once we engage in the extension of the boundary of the self into the "environment," then of course we imbue it with life and can quite properly regard it as animate—it is animate because we are a part of it. And, following from this, all the metaphorical properties so favored by poets make perfect sense: the Pathetic Fallacy is a fallacy only to the ego clencher. Metaphoric language is an indicator of "place"—an indication that the speaker has a place, feels part of a place. Indeed, the motive for metaphor may be as Frye claims, "a desire to associate, and finally to identify, the human mind with what goes on outside it, because the only genuine joy you can have is in those rare moments when you feel that although we may know in part . . . we are also a part of what we know."[13]

The act of naming may itself be a part of the process of establishing a sense of place. This is fairly easy to understand in a personal sense, that is, giving personal names to

[9]Sparshott, F. "Figuring the Ground: Notes on some Theoretical Problems of the Aesthetic Environment." *Journal of Aesthetic Education.* 6(3): 11-23. 1972.

[10]Frye, N. *The Educated Imagination.* Toronto, CBC, 1961, p. 9.

[11]Maclean, P. "The Paranoid Streak in Man," *in* Koestler, A. & J. Smythies (eds.), *Beyond Reductionism.* London, Hutchinson, 1969.

[12]Kvaløy, S. "Ecophilosophy & Ecopolitics: Thinking and Acting in Response to the Threats of Ecocatastrophe." *North American Review* 260: 17-28, Summer 1974.

[13]Frye, Northrop, *op cit,* p. 11.

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special components of a place, but it also may apply in the case of generic names. Perhaps the naturalist, with his penchant for learning the names of everything, is establishing a global place, making the world his home, just as the "primitive" hunter did on the territory of his tribe.

But whatever the mechanism, I persist in believing that there is some connection between the individual and his particular place and that, as Paul Shepard says, knowing who you are is impossible without knowing where you are from.[14] The recognition that the establishment of self is impossible without the context of place casts an entirely different light on the significance of the non-human, and underlines the futility of quantitative popularity ratings in the determination of the significance of public landscapes. The significance of place is a very personal thing, and the battle for the right to know "where I am from" is not one to be won by environmental impact assessments and benefit-cost analyses. The right to place, to know where one is from, is a right that is difficult to argue with the tools of the scientist. It is unfortunate, therefore, that those in the environmental sciences are assumed to be the logical choice as advocates in the environmental movement. In fact, many of the most significant arguments cannot be handled by their lexicon. Furthermore, their advocacy is, of necessity, limited to what Kvaloy[15] calls the "shallow ecological movement." The "deep ecological movement," the one that concerns itself with the underlying roots of the environmental crisis rather than simply its physical manifestation, demands the involvement of the arts and humanities. Yet it is the members of those disciplines that seem least frequently involved, with, as I said before, some very notable exceptions. In part this may be due to the reluctance of society to pay attention to anyone who is not a scientist. It may also be partly due to a fear that anyone interested in animals and flowers will be labeled a Romantic. But I fear it stems in part from the old assumption that the proper study for man is man. In accepting this, artists and humanists borrow from the sciences whose reductionism they so often criticize, for to suggest that man can and should be studied exclusive of his environment is as good an example of reductionism as we are likely to find. Hence, there is man, and there is environment. The humanist need feel responsible only for man. If there's a problem with the rest, call in a scientist. Indeed, even the suggestion that man is tied to anything but himself, or that he shares any biological imperatives with other creatures, is seen in some quarters as an affront to humanity. This is doubly unfortunate, I think, for not only does it bespeak a regrettably low opinion of the rest of creation, it also alienates from the environmental movement a portion of the population that could be its most potent force.

I am not advocating some kind of neo-romanticism, but rather an open endorsement of the value of the experience of landscape to counteract the prevailing attitude favoring only the consumption of landscape as a commodity. Far from being a demeaning concept, it should reveal "the self enobled and extended rather than threatened as part of the landscape and the ecosystem, because the beauty and complexity of nature are continuous with ourselves."[16] The subversive nature of Ecology rests on its assumption of literal interrelatedness, not just interdependence. Ecology as a discipline has been called upon to ignore the former and deal with the latter, on the assumption that the patterns of dependence can be shifted, whereas relatedness cannot. It seems to me that an involvement by the arts is vitally needed to emphasize that relatedness, and the intimate and vital involvement of self with place. Ultimately, preservation of the non-human is a very personal crusade, a rejection of the homogenization of the world that threatens to diminish all, including the self. There is no such thing as an individual, only an individual-in-context, individual as a component of place, defined by place. One can scarcely be critical of Ecology if it fails to incorporate such arguments into its equations. There are very severe limits placed on it by virtue of being, or aspiring to be, a science. Aldo Leopold complained that

> A professor may pluck the strings of his own instrument, but never that of another, and if he listens for music he must never admit it to his fellows or his students. For all are restrained by an ironbound taboo which decrees that the constuction of instruments is the domain of science, while the detection of harmony is the domain of poets.[17]

It is ironic, then, that when a society finally detects a dissonance in the world around it, it looks to Science for a solution. And so the ecologist mumbles on, picking up the pieces and pretending that the imminent discovery and marketing of a new miracle adhesive will restore the Harmony of the Biosphere. It's no good passing the buck to ecologists—environmentalism involves the perception of values, and values are the coin of the arts. Environmentalism without aesthetics is merely regional planing. □

[14]Shepard, Paul. *op cit.*

[15]Kvaløy, S. *op cit.*

[16]Shepard, Paul. *op cit.*

[17]Leopold, Aldo. *A Sand County Almanac and Sketches Here and There.* New York, N.Y. Oxford University Press, 1949. p. 153.

Coming in the NAR:

Political Heroes and Political Education, by Scott Edwards
Maybe we're teaching college students an undeserved disrespect for the men and women who serve in government

Fiction by Andre Dubus, Barry Lopez, T. Coraghessan Boyle, Pamela Skeen, and others

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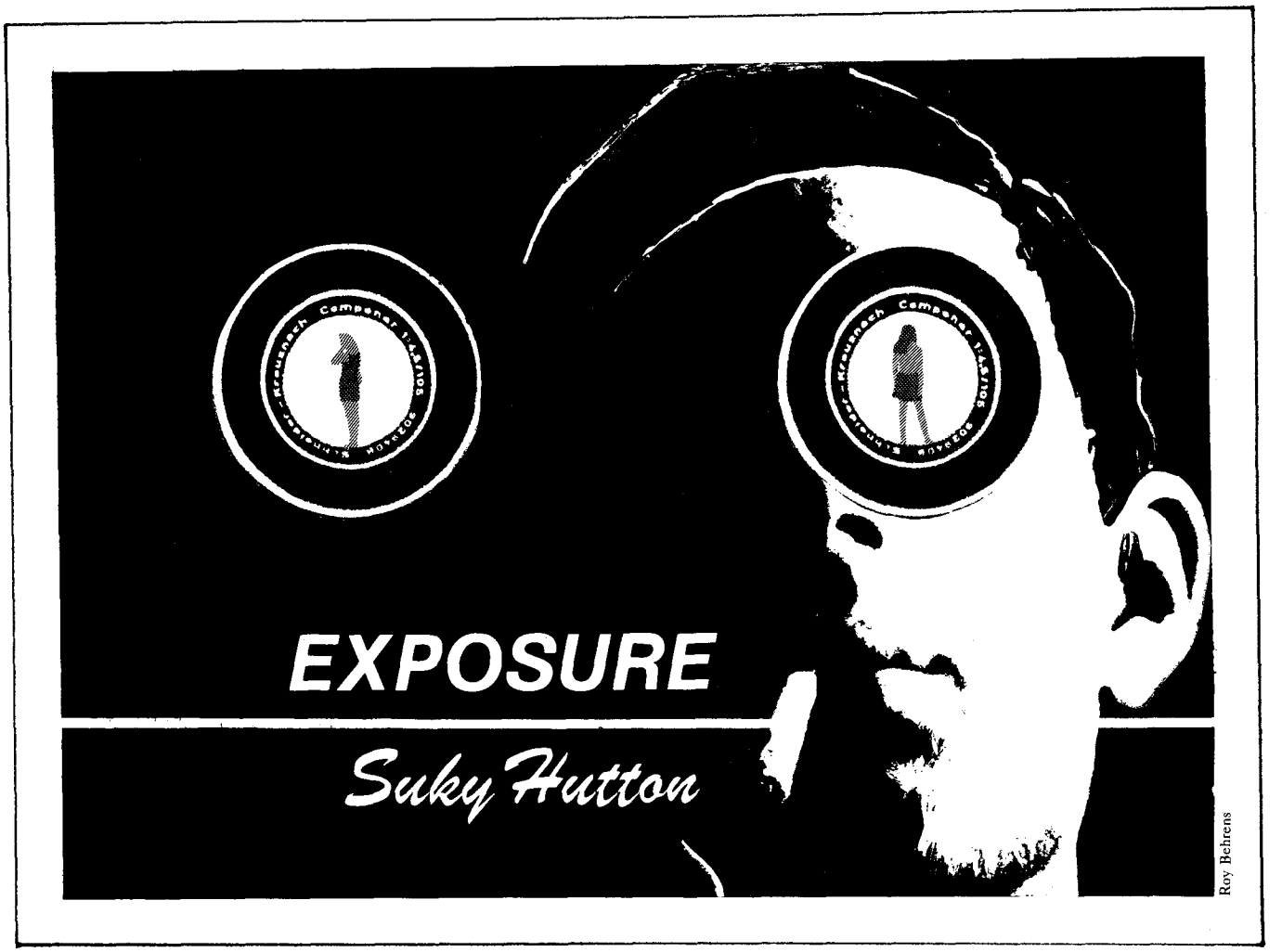

He was always accompanied by a smell of leather, smoke and decay. I didn't care; I was drawn to it, and besides the decay wasn't really noticeable until months after I fell for him. At seventeen he was a vision to cause any kickpleated member of drill team to twinge in fear and cross her legs. Silver studs nailed down every flap of his clothing, metalled gauntlets armored his wrists, and a camera rose like a periscope from his chest. "Take me, I'm yours," I breathed when he appeared in October with a tire chain slung where a belt should have been. "Nnh," he grunted. "Step back." His locker door crashed shut. His fingers were like spiderwebs on my face; the camera was suddenly aimed at me. There was a flash, a click and he was gone.

Bored with lumpish boys in lettermen sweaters, I found myself dropping by on slow week nights. His mother welcomed me, vaguely surprised and pleased, and waved me, drink in hand, to the end of the hall where she'd stowed him Grace Poole fashion. Outlined in greenish phosphorescence from the dials on his stereo, he would sit crushing out quartersmoked cigarettes in human head ashtrays he created in Art Study. Involuntarily my hands rose to rip out my barrettes. We rarely spoke.

"I'm a visual person. The image is everything," he told me one evening, wildly loquacious. "It's ethereal, it's a point in time. What I shoot can't be touched."

His long limbs hummed like high-tension lines; his knuckles crackled.

"There's nothing else left," he said. "It's all been handled, man; everything's so damned solid and fingerprinted and smeared. I'm cruising for vision, I'm going for the ultimate split-second, the single clean flash."

That night he shot a whole roll of me in the semi-dark. Braced for battle, I faced the lens. He wants me, he wants me, I positive-thought, trying not to blink.

"This is a wide-angle lens," he informed me.

"Do I look like a fish?"

"Hold it—" He snapped again. I was mute, awaiting direction.

He began to laugh beneath the camera, a rasping giggle.

"Hee hee hee," it was exhilarated, out of control, "hee hee hee."

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"You're perfect," he finally coughed. "One more shot," and he brushed the hair from around my face. For this contact, I'd waited weeks.

For weeks it continued. I would scuttle down the hall, whipped to a frenzy of silence by the thought of proximity to those stud-battened thighs, to find him motionless, a virgin mother over the child camera, made mystic by rising cigarette smoke. Glowing photographs layered his walls. It was impossible to discern subject matter.

"Infrared?" I asked.

"My own method," he said. "High speed."

As I scrutinized, he placed headphones over my ears. Beyond the raunchy flare of horns I sensed clicking and turned. The lens curved at me, bug-like, fathomless. "Just getting the feel," I lipread below it. There are better ways, I thought as he prowled around me, and felt my eyelids grow heavy.

"He's stoned-out, but beautiful," I heard in the john at school.

"Never again," a second voice said. A frosted, ring-eyed fifteen-year-old in black satin pants flipped her chin to the side, suctioned towards the mirror. "He scared the shit out of me, man. He starts slow, but then it's like he hasn't had any for years. Or," she added, "doesn't think he's gonna get any again, ever."

The other girl lined her eyes up with a leather hat.

"A little energy appeals to me," she said. "I thought he'd be too spaced to do anything but take pictures."

"Pictures are weird, though. Someone takes a picture of you like that and they just about own you, you know what I mean?"

They snickered, appreciatively. The blonde finished picking at her gleaming lower lip and shuddered. "You can be my guest," she said.

Of course he took drugs. No white crosses, though. "Don't need speed," he said, vibrating. His pupils welled out at me, wetly. When I found him especially high he sometimes spoke whole paragraphs. He told me of throwing his bike from a cliff onto his driveway, over and over, and I imagined him standing, bent like a praying mantis, hurling the metal up till it caught the glitter of gray through the cloud layer.

"It looked demonic, against the sky," he recalled. "It was just that it kept falling down. Want some?" He proffered a sugar cube.

"I'd rather get off without it," I answered, itching to unlace his black leather vest.

"Why are you here?" he asked.

"Don't you know?" I said hopefully.

He smiled slowly, a glistening V.

"I have something to show you," he said. Pictures of me, bleared to slot-eyed breadth with a wide-angle lens, faintly lucent, magnetic. I didn't recognize my expression.

"Your copy," he said, handing me the most ethereal of all. "Wanna go shoot some pictures?"

He had a small, low car. Blown over the otherwise immaculate interior was a shower of speeding tickets. We shot to the country, rolled to stillness on a muddy road. Wind was flexing through the grass fields. I crouched, jumped, leaned for the lens. I lay closed in by shivering weeds, one of his boots on either side of me as he took aim.

"Such a pure face," he said, "snow without footprints," and dropped to his knees over me.

"Make tracks, goddamnit," I thought, frozen with desire at the lens, recalling splayed hands better suited to balls palming me on the weekends.

He hunched above me and clicked to a pause. I thought I scented the darkroom on him, creeping foglike over his tightly sheathed legs and chest. Then the camera swung loose.

"Don't you shoot anyone else?" I asked. "Marni Fraser, Didi Lake?"

His eyes were enormously dilated.

"Fuel," he spat. "They're fuel, they're coals. I wouldn't shoot a fifth of tequila or a hit of acid."

"What am I?" I asked, his hips inches from mine.

He laughed, a saw on hardwood.

"Don't you know?" he said. "You're my negative."

He began appearing constantly on my doorstep.

"You know I can't shoot without you," he said, and the smell, pervasive, acrid, was thick in the smoke and the leather.

I was addicted. I went with him to bricked alleys, tilting warehouses, emergency ward entrances, building roofs, and waited for the moments he would arrange me with a finger here and a finger there.

"I think I preferred the country," I told him as I crawled onto a cornice.

"Testing, testing," he buzzed. "1, 2, 3, 4," the shutter snapped, "900."

"We're getting close," he added. I laughed, wiping my upper lip dry, and gripped the sandstone.

He only spoke once as we fled home, doing a steady hundred.

"Time stops when I shoot," he said.

By February he was followed by a group of hungry photographers. Mr. Frick, a thoughtful teacher, had pulled some of his early prints from the school darkroom's wastebasket and mailed them to a photography institute in California.

"Just tell me what kind of film you use," pleaded one silverbearded, turtlenecked man with two cameras gracing his abdomen.

"Your model—wherever did you find her? Can we meet her? Is she under contract?" another, younger one asked. I was standing two yards away, in my Honor Guard uniform and matching kneesocks.

"Special lighting," a third suggested.

"Just the *kind* of film." The bearded one caught up with him and held him by the gauntlet. He whirled and the rabble fell back.

"The film," the beard repeated nervously.

He cackled, a scraping of scorn.

"What if I told you," he said, "I don't *use* film," and, still cackling, stalked off.

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By March the supply of fifteen-year-olds was exhausted. They barricaded themselves with locker doors when he passed, still as sniffing deer. The camera was less of a fixture; sunglasses were taking its place. Behind them his eyes glimmered like reservoirs on moonless nights. I couldn't recall their original color. He blinked frequently and erratically when the sunglasses were off, in his room, and his voice grew increasingly staccato.

"You're not in class much any more," I commented.

"Too busy. What's history anyway?" He rummaged through an ashtray filled with peyote buttons; one fell from its lips. "None of those dudes could call halts. None of them could say, this is my moment, man, and suspend it before things got boring."

He had a blinking fit.

"You're best in the dark," he said. "That's how we'll do it."

I clenched my hands.

He picked up a stack of prints, fanned them like cards, and began dealing them to me. They were grainier. They made me think of molecules. I recognized the settings but not the face. It looked like a dead dandelion: fragile, bleached, ready to disintegrate with a breath.

"I'm so pale," I said.

He watched me, trembling unevenly.

"You're pale too," I noticed. His face was naked, ascetic without the black half-mask of camera. He moved to study himself in the chrome of his stereo, making clucking sounds and blinking.

"Are you going to keep this kind of stuff up until graduation?" I asked. It was March. "You're burning yourself out."

"Graduation?"

The surface of his eyes swirled at me, darkly. The whites were losing ground.

"Graduating from what to what?" he said. There was a pause and he began to giggle frenetically, stopped only by an attack of dry little coughs.

"It's gonna be a photo finish," he gasped, eyelids fluttering.

I looked at my tight fists. When I glanced up again, the camera was raised and aimed. The motor drive he'd acquired kept the constant whir of film in my ears, a soft, hypnotic surging with clicks. I focused back at the camera, still as the lens, and wondered if it was loaded.

Suddenly, I didn't see him. He wasn't in school.

"You could leave a note with me, though I don't know where he is these days," his mother said. "I'd like to finally get the cleaning lady back there but she won't go because of the smell."

I went back anyway and found only heaps of crumpled cigarettes and a dismantled camera. All the peyote buttons were gone.

It was a wretched two weeks. I stopped eating; I turned down dates with disgusted ease, craving the dentist-drill edge, the high-tension line buzz of expectation. After twelve days I was dragged to the family doctor. On the fourteenth day, to avoid further questioning, I went to a game.

I spotted him as the drill team marched in formation from the gym and broke away. He was slouching against a wall, out of the light.

"Don't want any overexposure," he smiled. The rotting, faintly chemical smell was rampant.

"Where have you been?"

He was wearing, not sunglasses, but full goggles.

"I *missed* you!" I told him.

He touched my face, examining it. "Are you ready?" he asked.

I followed him to his car.

"Can you see with those things on?" I asked.

We spun shrieking from the parking lot.

Fifteen minutes later we were in the country. The speedometer read 110. There was no light anywhere but our headlights. Beside the road the grass flashed pale, erratically, like a badly-made experimental movie. He began to speed up.

"Scared?" His teeth gleamed from the side, green in the glow from the instrument panel.

"This is what you wanted, isn't it?" He lifted the goggles. "You want me."

The speedometer read 136. He turned to look at me.

"Demonic," he murmured. "You're shining, you're ice."

His eyes were huge, round, black. They jutted in metal columns an inch and a half from their sockets.

"The ultimate union," he coughed, kept coughing with a sound like sticks snapping, and then lunged down once more on the accelerator. The car screamed; before it soared from the road I saw the lenses aimed at me, and then there was a single whoompf of searing light and a single, delicate click. □

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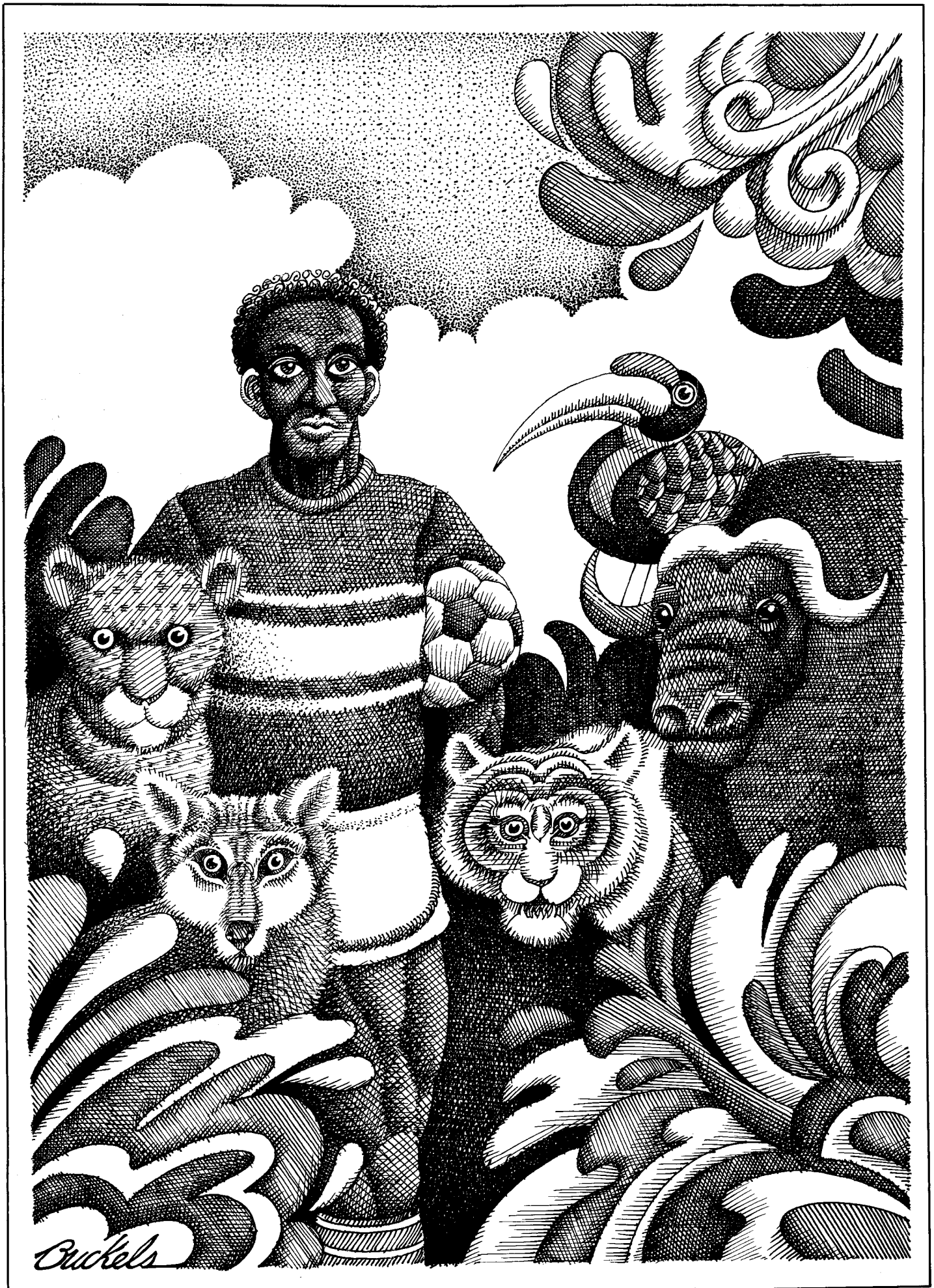

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OUR BIG GAME

GEORGE ROSEN

My students were dissecting field mice when Gichuru called me into the school office. Gichuru is our headmaster, an intelligent man with a dark, handsome African face that belongs on a coin. He waved a letter in my face. "Read it!" he said. "They refuse to come here. He says our field is like a battleground, that if the game is played here the boys will disappear into holes, that they will never be seen again."

I looked at MacIntyre's letter. It indeed said those things, and more—insinuations about safari ants (which had some truth to them), and quicksand (which were ridiculous). The school where I teach is small. It is quite new, built after Independence, and it is poor, without money to pay for glass windows or concrete sidewalks. The soccer field does in fact have a rise in the middle which can partially obscure oncoming players and there are a few potholes hidden by high grass. They are not "deep and perilous" as MacIntyre's letter claimed.

But MacIntyre has a bee up his ass about our school and especially about our headmaster. Gichuru was once a student of his—an exemplary prefect whom MacIntyre permitted to wear long pants. But now that they are in positions of nominal equality, MacIntyre detests him. *Detests* is probably too gentle a term for the loathing MacIntyre feels. He places on Gichuru's shoulders the blame for all that has gone awry in East Africa in the past forty years, all the crevasses and faults that have crumbled Mac's now queasy firmament.

Gichuru doesn't deserve this. He is a conscientious, perennially worried man who would be better off if he had even one-half the demonic energy Mac attributes to him. Basically a clerkish man, Gichuru has immense respect for the written word; he issues frequent memoranda to students, cutting elegant stencils for our mimeograph machine. He admires files and keeps too many old letters. Far from being an avenger of old injustices, he is—or would be, but for a solid core of dignity—a sycophant of peace and quiet.

His office is small, a corrugated tin cubicle sliced off the end of a long block of classrooms. One cannot storm about in it. But even seated at his desk Gichuru was still furious. Furious and hurt. He knew that our field was not what it should be and that Mac's—graded, damped, chalked and dusted into a pampered baby of a field—was better. But it was an issue of pride and proper alternation.

I suggested a neutral site, the coffee research station ten miles from us, neatly between the two schools and run by a neutral party. Abraham Muriuki is also a former student of Mac's, a knightly scientist-scholar who has read widely in his evenings up there on the mountain and understands things foreign to East Africa, like the Abominable Snowman and Huey Long, as well as he knows the secrets of the Chinese box of husks and shells in which the coffee bean lies. The research station has a soccer field, too; neither so elegant as Mac's nor so humble as our own. Gichuru sent me off after class to present the plan to MacIntyre.

I'd intended to go up the road anyway to see Sally. She teaches at the girls' school that forms a part—although a more remote part than the boys' school—of Mac's complex of powers at Chorumbe. I rode in the back of a Land Rover taxi between bags of black millet and clumps of chickens tied together at the feet. Everywhere on the road there were runners: boys and girls in school uniforms, policemen in their military caps and khaki shorts. The whole country has gone mad for running, especially those who have read the papers and seen the Olympians, their pictures wired from Mexico City and Munich—Kipchoge with the medals around his neck, a sombrero on his head, his smile as wide as a feeding whale's. Children who used to run from house to house in the morning juggling a hot coal in their hands to bring fire to a neighbor, now do it all for sport. They measure off the mountainside into 1500-meter chunks and errands take half-time. The primary kids come to school early, are home before dark and off again on the road, lamps in their hands, the earth spinning underfoot.

But MacIntyre stands still. He arranges the motion of others. At our school if students quarrel, they must settle their differences before nightfall; if two fight, both are punished. Equilibrium is the goal. At Mac's school he makes them box, whether the quarrel was peaceful or violent. They are not used to the gloves. At no other time do they fight this way. But Mac makes them circle and strike with all their running quadrangled off until one falls down. Then the others must watch while MacIntyre raises a hand in victory and dismisses them all to the dormitory. Even there, while the students run among the cots and the piled exercise books, they know that Mac may be near, still and watching. He has been known to stand just beyond the windows during the study period that precedes sleep, listening to make sure that all their talking is in English. If he hears a phrase in Kigeli or an oath—and the oaths will be in Kigeli, for all their English has been learned from him and they have been given no words for hostility or despair—then he bursts in. He comes so suddenly that there seem to be no door or steps, nothing except the apparition of Mac, his bald head like a great marble egg boring up through the tamped dirt floor, dragging the speakers of forbidden utterances off to punishment.

The man has no flesh. He is all stone and bone. Even under an equatorial sun in a short-sleeved shirt and corduroy shorts he stays white as a sepulchre. He wears a hat, though, a large perfect cone of straw in the style of the country in which he was born—Basutoland, which is now called Lesotho—a mountain enclave in South Africa where his parents were missionaries. The family trails missionaries back for generation upon generation. Mac is pure, untainted by memory. He has none of the sullen

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escapism of the runaway missionaries who have left modest positions at home and come out for the servants and deference as much as for the challenge of the faithless, those who still remember snow and marigolds and the friendly anonymity of being roughly the same color as everyone else.

But like a sailor who has known only captains, seamen, prostitutes and fish, the world for Mac is peopled in skewed and perplexing ways. He sees no whites between the ages of five and twenty since the children of other missionaries are all whisked away to schools in England, America, or Nairobi. Blackness, for Mac, is a condition of adolescence like acne or daydreams, a forcing-house through which dark and light babies pass according to a scheme over which he himself presides.

When I arrived at Chorumbe Sally was in her front room grading papers. Out her window I could see Mac by the soccer field at the top of the ridge. He stood tall with his cone hat, still and straight, while the afternoon sun flattened the scurrying football squads into two clashing lines. MacIntyre's soccer teams never lose except through minor epidemics or treachery. Even when some of the players are three-quarters of the way to a malarial crisis there is no guarantee of defeat. One of Mac's front lines—their brains and brows inflamed with fever—can speed down the field like the wall of a burning forest, scorching everything before them. The first tiers of the opposition curl and cinder to ash, then the backs, until nothing lies between the goalie and his destruction but the ball, afire like Mac's will with a heat so intense that it consumes the flesh it touches and will burn right through the goalie's grasp into the net, leaving nothing at the end of the goalkeeper's arms but faint outlines—the merest memory of human hands.

Sally told me she thought of seducing Mac last month.

"Blackmail?"

"Oh come on. Humiliation. Compromise. Can you imagine what would happen if Mac was discovered making midnight advances on Chorumbe's one unmarried white woman in the privacy of her bedchamber? It would be such a relief to everyone. The old women would sing. It would be wonderful!"

"What was he doing in your bedchamber at midnight?"

"Changing the light bulb."

MacIntyre conserves energy. The generator shed is next to his house and the machine runs only from dusk to one a.m. Mac has all the light bulbs. He doesn't approve of high wattage and everyone's eyes tear for his thrift. If a bulb fails, the teacher (it will not be a student since they cannot leave their dormitory after dinnertime) must plead at MacIntyre's door like the Holy Roman Emperor who abased himself in the snow before the Pope's mountain retreat. Then Mac will come with his bag of light.

Sally had been reading *The Prisoner of Zenda* in bed when the light went out and she stumbled down the path to Mac's house in only her raincoat and underwear. Mac came out to her in boots and his immense wool nightshirt. No one ever remembers a time when Mac did not wear it on his late night calls. It must have grown up with him, some anonymous Basuto hands weaving it taller as the boy grew until now it has the age and majesty of something fit to be found in a pharaoh's tomb.

It occurred to Sally that there was a quality of knightliness about Mac—whitegowned and bulbclutching as he was—something in his single-pointed determination to pursue the consequences of his power. As they crossed the threshold into Sally's house, now darker than the moonlit forest behind it, this knightliness—and the light—gave their action a medieval cast and made it a kind of elopement.

For a moment she entertained the thought of exploring the issue, of testing him. But there was nothing really to explore. He refused the cup of tea by candlelight which Sally offered, and while feudal romances flickered briefly in her brain against all knowledge of the man, Mac, oblivious, changed the light. He stood on her bed and strained for the dangling socket. When the new bulb finally shone, he looked down at this lovely woman in her raincoat and underwear and saw nothing but a skeleton. Her womanness to him was a few extra centimeters of pelvic girdle—just bones—our mortal lattice staring up his nightshirt.

"He told me to do my reading by daylight. I could have stripped and it wouldn't have meant a thing to him. He'd rather eat his apples and be severe."

Sally gave her sympathies about the game. As she realized, there was a question of money in all this—the rental of a vehicle to ferry our team back and forth to the research station—something we could barely afford every other year in the normal course of things. And there was a failed obligation to our fans—the other students and their families who would all have come if we'd played at home, the old women cheering their grandsons on as if the President had come to town. Mac couldn't care less about the money. He owned his own bus and could bring whomever he pleased. Against his host we would have only Mugambi (our school watchman and owner of the Land Rover we'd rent), Gichuru and myself.

Sally was right about the apples. Mac was chewing on one when I talked with him. He has them shipped in from Kitale in the Rift Valley, the only place in the country where they grow. These are equatorial apples—too rosy and soft. Their texture is to the real fruit's as sausage is to steak. Mac supplies his own crunch. He didn't object to our scheme. Any location, he said, would suit him as long as he kept out of our trenches. He was, oddly, quite polite. He showed me a silent butler he'd carved from a single block of ebony. I complimented his talent and started back.

In the fortnight before the game our team worked endless drills—roadwork, lunges, dribbles, foot, head, toe, heels, knees, insteps. Gichuru walked and I ran up and down the sidelines calling out instruction and encouragement. Elasticity and control were our object; our method, a combination of screams, telepathy and rhetoric. I chalked crosses and circles, arrows and boxes on the board, spinning around my own foggy ideal of team-

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work while Gichuru worked on individual essence, trying to infuse a rubbery wisdom into their bodies—a heightened irritability of the limbs that would move the ball with more speed and complexity than Mac's boys could handle.

It was difficult to know if it was working. They only played each other. And their highest accomplishments often seemed to be to please us, their teachers. They hadn't enough of the killer egoism we both thought they needed. We were scared.

In the midst of our apprehension Gichuru was taking precautions. Next to the name of Mugambi the watchman in the school accounts there was an entry of 20 shillings, over and above the normal Land Rover rental fee. "For special assistance at the game." In the mornings when I called Mugambi to help drive away the cows who were eating my vegetables he'd giggle furiously, swat the bovine rumps and give me a whole praise-song on the wisdom and foresight of Gichuru.

Mugambi has been through a lot. He fought for Independence with the Land Freedom Army. Or as the British say he was a Mau-Mau. In the days of the Emergency the British came through by day to round up traitors or at least potential soldiers, and at night the rebels came out of the forest for their own recruiting. Mugambi was whipped with the broad side of a panga often enough by both sides that he took to spending a good deal of time up a tree in the woods munching bananas that his daughter brought him. One night the guerilla band that he had arbored himself to avoid caught the glint of his knife in the starlight, surrounded his tree and shook him down. A man of resourcefulness, he explained that he'd come to join up and spent the next eighteen months dodging napalm and developing a terror of unseen footsteps. When he came blinking out of the forest he found that a neighbor had quite legally taken his land. His clansman Gichuru got him the watchman job and through the purchase of a rundown Land Rover he became a diligent hauler of other people's goods. He was going to help us somehow. Gichuru spoke only of contingencies and prescribed deep knee-bends for the team.

MacIntyre's entrance the day of the game—zebra-striped youths with starched collars; a painted bus, dentless, shining; a phalanx of supporters in the sunlight. Ah, the cleanliness of that team, the pure pistoned effort of their warmups! Smooth kicks to the left, then at a whistle, to the right, up in long stretches, running in place. Swirls of hip and elbow that if we'd tried would have landed us in desperate bruised heaps they carried out like a policeman's twirled nightstick—deft and potent. Their preparation was perfect, above our hatred. We regarded them the way sheep must observe power mowers; they performed the same tasks we did but their construction and source of power were beyond us.

We had come to the field piled in the old Land Rover. It hit the gravel of the research station drive, lurched and discarded us onto the field. MacIntyre and his team kept looking at us as if we'd spilled something on their laps. They were so neat, colorful, scrubbed. We were going to play soccer against the Easter Parade.

Our captains flipped for direction. The Chorumbe boy won and after getting confirmation from Mac at the sideline (Mac nodding gravely, almost in sleep), he went with the wind. Muriuki spilled the ball between the two forward lines, leapt aside, and the game was on.

It was not one-sided. But it was not nearly two-sided. They were the sea, we were the land, and the tide was up. They had one boy built like a thug, legs almost as big around as a Cape buffalo's belly and a forehead quite as wide and capable as a Cape's horns. He was slow to start but quick and terrible once in motion. Our players, however brave, when faced with the buffalo boy panting down toward them, shied, swerved and left the field open. Then the buffalo boy rumbled into position, stared blankly dead on the ball and sent low hard kicks straight to our goalie's teeth.

This inspired fear, but fortunately was not the best way to score. The kicks were too long. Our goalie would see the ball hurtle grand in his vision, like an astronaut viewing the earth when something has gone horribly wrong, and would jerk his hands up to his face (which was of course just the thing to do), saving us and his nose from certain destruction. Some of the Chorumbe schoolboys shouted "Well done!" at the buffalo boy's kicks. But Mac would stare them quiet and call the big boy back to the side. "Pass, you bloody fool," he'd breathe into the boy's ear and then sit him down on the bench to cool off. With the team's golden calf on the sideline Mac's discipline took over, the fierce teamwork he had drummed into them. Obliqueness was everything, the ball skittering from foot to foot, over, around and underneath us. Our boys threw themselves at the ball—huge long leaps to block a pass with shoulder or chest that missed and sent them skidding across the turf while the Chorumbe players skipped over the bodies and pushed on downfield.

Gichuru and I tried to cheer our team on in Kigeli and English. But every smooth steal and stroke of the Chorumbe team brought a roar from MacIntyre's bus-brought claque, a whistle-blast of confidence. All we could muster were murmurs, faint rumblings like rumors in a tyranny. Mugambi, though, had none of our despondence. He squatted on the sidelines, laughing and patting his kneecaps. In the last minutes of the half we were down two goals. Mugambi looked up to Gichuru. "You will need me now. This is proper." Gichuru nodded. Both moved downfield to where Muriuki was watching and huddled with him while I kept yelling vain commands to our players, all of us enmired in Mac's excellence.

Halftime came, and Gichuru and I passed around towels and oranges to our team. On the Chorumbe side of the field Mac snapped his fingers and two team managers went around with plastic spouted waterbottles dosing out some sweet special liquid while the boys cleaned their cleats. There would be a forty-five minute break with a show by local primary school children. Muriuki invited us all in for tea. He didn't like the taste of coffee.

"You are an artisan these days, Mr. MacIntyre? I have heard of your skill."

A pigtailed girl poured milk and sugar into our cups.

"Yes, I like to make things. Carving, furniture, scroll-

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work. It passes the time."

"And you shrink heads?"

Mac's windpipe bubbled.

"Excuse me, isn't this true? I had heard that they were quite wonderful."

"You mean the apples, Mr. Muriuki. I don't shrink heads. I shape them. I work with the fruit. One can carve features into the fruit and then as they dry and wither they begin to take on expressions. Joyful, sad, the whole range. When it achieves just the look you want, you seal it with clear varnish and it is preserved precisely."

I'd seen them in Mac's office. They were horrible. Little grimace-ridden fruitheads. They were the only things he was ever willing to give anybody.

Muriuki persisted. "Have you ever seen our samba wood? The old Kigeli men made stools from it. Here . . ." and he reached above the mantle and drew down a small polished stool about a foot high.

I had never seen one before, at Muriuki's house or anywhere else. It was a smooth round seat on three small graceful legs, each leg carved in the shape of a human figure—a warrior with a spear, a woman carrying a water-gourd, and a tribal elder sitting in judgment. The wood was dark and rich. Like a silk carpet it seemed to change color in different light—now black, now brown, but always above a fire red that leapt out where the wood had been worn smoothest and that underlay the whole.

"With these three figures an old man tending cattle would have the whole of the tribe with him. He could sit there comfortably in the sun, his spear on the ground beside him, quiet among the animals of his clan and content. It is a beautiful thing, isn't it?"

MacIntyre rubbed his palm across the smoothness of the seat. He traced the figures with his fingers. He was about to smile. "It's a fine piece. I've never . . ."

"They are not made anymore. Or not with the same skill."

"This is called samba?" Mac was holding the stool as if it were a bird.

"Yes, the wood's still around though there are only a few groves. One of them is here." Muriuki's grin was as wide as one of the Olympic heroes. "Five minutes away in the forest. I have a power saw you could use."

"But the game . . ."

We all agreed that there was still time. The field was dancing with primary school children singing the national anthem in Swahili and "I'm a Little Teapot" in English.

"Mugambi here knows the path. He can show you the way and you'll be back quickly with your arms full of samba. Consider it a gift of welcome to my house."

Mac still had the stool cupped between his hands. He put it back on the mantle and nodded his head. Muriuki told Mugambi where to get the saw and some rope and the watchman dashed out the door.

The sun was turned off instantly, like a lamp, when the two of them entered the forest. Mugambi went in front, holding the saw by a thick leather strap. The tool swung by his side in rhythm with his walk, the teeth slimly missing his bare leg with each swing. Mac kept watching it at the instant it swayed nearest the curly hairs on Mugambi's leg. Each time the cutting edges passed clear, the white man freed his gaze. He looked up at the creeper-ridden canopy of the woods, the thick-leaved vines twisting among the evergreens and palms. High at the tops he could see a colobus monkey following them, jumping from tree to tree. Then at a signal from the ticking in Mac's mind his eyes went down again toward the body of the man in front of him and the teeth of the saw dipped along the bunched muscles of Mugambi's calf about to cut and draw blood, but always missing.

"I wish you wouldn't do that."

Mugambi stopped and the saw swung out in a semi-circle towards Mac.

"There is no danger here. I know the forest."

"Not the forest, damn it, the saw. Hold it firmly or you're going to slice yourself open."

"Do not mind, sir. These woods are like my home. I fought very near here."

"With the Home Guard?" Mac had been an officer himself.

"Yes. The Home Guard. They were our enemy. You need not be afraid of the saw, sir, or snakes, leopards or anything. I will guide you. The place we are going is quite close here."

Mugambi was back in full stride. The saw kept swinging and Mac kept watching it, holding his wonder at the forest inside the tick-tock of imagined bloodletting. The path disappeared but Mugambi continued with his neverminds. They ducked under branches and stumbled over fallen logs alive with white slugs and mushrooms big as moons. The watchman, still letting the saw dangle free, paused more often now. Once or twice he backtracked. They were in constant twilight.

Mugambi stopped and blinked very quickly. He brought the fingertips of his free hand to his mouth and looked about in a slow mechanical circle. Everywhere the same dark greens and browns closed over their heads and they were centered in a bubble inside the twining.

"We are lost," he said, crossing his legs to sit down, and then he started yelping in pain.

At the field the primary school children had sung all their songs. Muriuki as the official host decided that the schedule should be followed, and the game continue, with or without MacIntyre. The Chorumbe captain's sense of natural authority was confused (as was unavoidable with Mac's students), but he had a solid textbook conception of responsibility. He was a tall stiff adolescent who moved like a pair of scissors but had soft wise eyes that were always near terror. He called a brief huddle, asked his players not to let their courage flag, and reminded them that they were ahead two goals. They clasped hands, cheered, and the game resumed.

But there were no sudden sweeps this time, no apache charges. The field was clotted, thick, the players slamming into scrums that looked like street-cleaning machines, their upper bodies stuck together and their several feet kicking frantically. There were injuries and

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outcries, Muriuki running into the clashes to adjudicate. He'd blow his whistle, a boy would limp to the sidelines and a fresh body would dash to the game. Amid the flesh-bumping the buffalo boy began to emerge again. Sometimes he broke out—shaking opponents off and kneeing toward the open field. And sometimes he seemed passive—the boy and ball expelled from the heap, spit out like a bounced drunk and his hat. Once in blue sky and open air, the whole confused crowd of players chasing after him, he leaned forward, gritted his whole face, every muscle squeezed tight except the dead center, the tip of his nose, and smashed out the same long mean pointless kicks as before—which our goalie scooped up or bounced off or headed down until he shook and resounded like an abused bell.

There was no Mac to yank the buffalo boy now. The Chorumbe captain knew what he ought to do. But he was afraid, not of any malevolence on the part of his oak-thighed teammate, but of the buffalo boy's fierce crazy oblivion to anything other than shattering worlds with his foot. Mac might handle that, but nobody sixteen years old and forty pounds lighter could.

So our team started playing to the big man, waiting for the sure turnover. Then they'd kick the ball among themselves, juggling it like one of the hearth coals they used to carry as children, each boy more surprised than the last at the possibility of a score, until they sent it on to the Chorumbe goalie—who in the first half could have been comatose. He strained and scrapped at the ball but one, two—now the tie—and three times let it dribble past him.

And so we won. Though the Chorumbe captain called timeouts until there were none left and Mac's team in their starch and stripes kept looking to the forest for succor, no one appeared at the threshold. Strain as they might for the flash of his eyes, the shine of his head, there was nothing to see, a deep black hole.

Until the game was over. Muriuki who during the play had waved away the anxiety of the Chorumbe schoolboys, praising Mugambi's knowledge of the woods, finally relented and called a station worker to send him in after Mac and our watchman.

But there was no need. The blackness at the edge of the forest suddenly filled and there was Mac, naked to the waist. Cradled under his left arm was a log of dark samba that must have weighed a hundred pounds. Over his right shoulder he pulled a length of rope, the end of which dragged Mugambi riding on a lashed mass of branches and twigs. The watchman was rubbing his ankle with one hand and holding the saw steady with the other. He was singing something very low and growly with an infinity of syllables.

"The man's an absolute fool," Mac said. "But I've taken care of him nonetheless. He at least had the good sense to sprain his ankle not ten feet from the samba trees. As you see I found the wood on my own, strapped his foot, jerry-built this sledge and found our way out. Quite good, I think, like the dogs pull among the Eskimo or your Western Indians with their ponies."

Mac's team did not greet him. They huddled close around their captain.

"I trust the game has not been unduly delayed?"

Mac dropped the pullrope to Mugambi's sledge, keeping the samba log under his arm, and began to move toward us. Suddenly the Chorumbe captain ran to him out of the circle and began to explain, shoulders back, arms at his side—a terrified classroom declamation. Mac dropped the log.

Gichuru came to him smiling. Madly, he started shaking Mac's hand over and over as if electricity were gluing them together. He was congratulating Mac on his team's play. Mac's white skin went even paler—into a clear glaze that seemed to show the swing and pulse of blood underneath, the striping of the tensed muscles—the transparent man and the black man still shaking hands.

"You are responsible for this," Mac said.

"The decision to resume play was made by the host official. Those are the rules." Muriuki nodded.

"Then you're both responsible."

"We did what was proper. I am not ashamed."

Mugambi meanwhile was inching himself off the sledge. He raised himself to his feet, leaned in both directions, then made a small circle. Satisfied with his progress he tried some tentative jumps, both feet together and then like a crazy sunflower burst into ecstatic hopping. "I am fine now," he said, bouncing past the disputation, "I am better. This is better," and pogo-sticked over to the Land Rover already stuffed with our team.

MacIntyre spoke in a soft dead voice. "You are an insult to me, Gichuru. I was your teacher." He wrenched free of the handshake and raised his huge hand up in the air.

Gichuru did not move at all. He spoke from his handsome mask. "Do not strike me, Mr. MacIntyre. I know that you are a hard man." Mac dropped his hand. The two of them backed away from each other, both retreating as one would from a king.

Some of our boys in the Land Rover began to whistle but Gichuru cut them off and stood quiet. MacIntyre called his schoolboys together and told them to gather their things. The captain with the wise eyes attended Mac, tilting toward him to catch his wishes. He stumbled as he tried to keep up with MacIntyre's long strides toward the bright bus. When the Chorumbe team had gone Gichuru let the boys hoot and whistle all they wanted. Mac left the log of samba wood on the field.

Since the game Muriuki has returned to his science and coffee beans while Gichuru and I are busy preparing our students for the national examinations. Gichuru is more animated than ever before and shows signs of ambition. He speaks of becoming a politician someday, although on what side of the issues he does not yet know. We still haven't heard from Mac, although I've spoken with Sally. She is worried that he will take the whole business out on his own students—some sort of reign of terror. She says the only lesson he seems to have learned is that there is danger in pity. As for Mugambi, he stays at the old job, running Gichuru's errands and keeping watch at night. He bought a goat with the extra money he earned. It is a large fat creature and someday soon it will make a feast for us all. □

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THOMAS BRUSH

TWO POEMS FROM THE PIKE PLACE MARKET MUSICAL

Floating

1
Dawn churning in Puget Sound. Or rust. Rust
Dripping from the gutters, down the metal
Screens nailed to the windows, black
And wet. Grace turns on the gas,
Watches the yellow flame
Go blue, fills the copper pot with water
That tastes like iron. The sky
Has fallen again into the street. The lamps sputter
And go out. Grace at the cracked bowl
Looks over the moss covered roof, the rotting
Shingles, rubs her hands
With pink soap. At the mirror
She stops.

2
She remembers
Ships straining
In their moorings, a fleet of memory, a floating war
Tied to the earth in Bremerton. Sailors
Grip the canvas bunks, one above the other. Someone
Is floating in Green Lake. Face down. Someone is floating
Through the air beneath the Aurora
Bridge and hitting the surface of Lake Union.
Another distant splash. The harbor
Patrol boat leaves the dock. The crew, in yellow
Slickers and black boots, drink
Coffee, ready the hooks and stiff ropes. They look
At the flat lake as if it were grass
Or grain or an infield

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3
Morning and THE MARKET
Hides in itself. Oil drums shudder on the wet
Concrete. Outside FEDERAL GOODS the wind billows
The gray awnings, the peacoats and helmet liners,
Left over from some other war, drift in the windows.
An old man, with his lost hands buried in a raincoat, waits
For the sun to find its way from the center of the earth.
The cobbled alleys sigh. Mice roll over
In the weeds. Grace leaves the hotel, leaves the spider's
Truth, letters smouldering at the back
Of a drawer, the pearls
Like polished teeth on the dresser. She wraps a blue coat
Around her, tightens the belt, goes bareheaded, her crooked heels
Tapping out the blind sounds of her past, the disappearing
Fields of Ohio.
She greets the legless paper-man, smiles
Because it's March, because he still gets up
In the dark, hauls himself to the plywood
Platform, pulls the string of the single lightbulb, asks
What time she gets off work, when she'll take him
Home. It's getting warm, Grace. There are wildflowers
In the Cascades. I could make it
Warmer.

In the Place Pigalle
She makes coffee, sweeps the floor, pours wine from gallons
Into quart bottles, flips the calendar
Over. She wipes the bar
And remembers a lake resort when she was 17, swimming in the cold
Water, naked and in love. Remembers the whiskey clotted face, blood
On the windshield. The chairs stacked
On the tables watch and keep
Quiet. Stains, scratches, initials
Carved in the rock walls, lives laid out
In pieces.

In the wall the gallons of Muscatel, Ruby Port, Tokay
Shrink in the chrome cellar, the frosted
Refrigerator, igloo for lemons
And limes, sweet red cherries, eggs lolling
In the still wind. The bottles
Drip their secrets on the corroded racks. Rosé and Apple
Andy. The vacant eyes of change,
Buffaloes, and Liberty, John F. Kennedy
In a jar. A night shift
Of colored water and flowers. The surface
Of the moon.

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4
Grace.
Queen of Music smiles just for Willy.
He brings his own straw and doesn't
Spill a drop. For every tongue
On the brown rim there are drunks
In the men's room, drunks
In the hall, the smell of piss and a graveyard
For the blind.

This is for the bloated dead,
for the Indian circling
the room, praying for sunshine and a tree
of fire. This is for the women
scattering into themselves, lying down
to darkness, taking off their shimmering gowns.
None of them are young. None of them
are smiling.

Only Bob
Laughing in her ear. You're a girl, Grace.
Your breasts are like birds,
Live and trembling in my hands. The soft hair.
The wounded steps home. I'm afraid of fire.
The bar looms like water at night. I could drown in it.

5
Quiet, Willy. Willy No Leg.
Hobble
Off to the rain forest. Be twenty years old with legs
That bend. There was row after row of overturned boats, cattails
Lining the shore. Grace and the lovely promise. But body
Makes no promise. Hair and purple flesh, the red knob
Of skin over the sawed bone. Come on, Willy,
Let's go.

Dance for us, Grace. Come on
Honey, dance on the fucking bar! Bowing Bob. Gentleman
Bob. Bob of the shore patrol swings his knee
That picks the sailor up
And drops him. The white hat and vomit. Someone claps,
Says, "Hooray for our side," and drinks what's left
Of the beer.

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6
There are crates of ruined oranges, rinds, rotting leaves
And eyes beneath the cracked boards. They look
Through doors and shutters, the green
Awnings. They call out prices
And curse the housewives bartering
For leeks and onions, lettuce, the broken ankles
Of sheep glazed with jelly, heads of goats,
Leather belts. The garbagemen wring the past
Clean. Skulls and tripe, brains soaking in brine, the soiled
Cloth of day.

Hose down the bones, mend
The nets of fishermen hauling the dark
Waters for dogfish, sea slugs and snails.
There are lines, leader and rope around the whole wet world.
There's a kid with a guitar and a tambourine
Filled with coins to get it started. The empty billows
Of the place. A transient getting
His in the men's room. A hooker thinking.
Moving uptown. Flies and bloodstreaked
Sewers. There is packed dirt, and a peeling fence
Across from the bookstore. Tarzan, copyright 1921.
Emporium Tea & Coffee is a storefront of seagulls
On driftwood, colored sand-candles, a painting
Of the Narrows Bridge falling forever into the mile-high ocean.
Airplanes fill the sky with kerosene. Car lots
And kelp.

7
There are children in THE MARKET, taking field trips,
Walking in rows, holding hands, looking down
The swarming gangway where the buildings
Slide into the sea. They sit at the wide counters,
With the old men, holding their small chins
In their hands. An army of workers leaves
The oil stained factory. Here and now and the end
Of it. No.
Trollers head out from the straw docks
And the land hisses at their backs. Cut a herring, a silver
Spinner so the plug swims as if wounded, turns
For good action. Chinook, humpie, blackmouth,
Snow! There's snow on the decks, the running
Lines are frozen! Snow under the sun.
In the white smoke of the Pacific.

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8
Grace wipes the plastic seats, the brass
Rail, sets out beer-nuts, napkins, Polish sausage.
The girls are just outside
And the night.
A man sliced from nose to throat,
Gushed his life on the hardwood floor. Sawdust. If
We had sawdust. Hardboiled eggs, the last free
Lunch in town. Saw him gag, turn once
Toward tomorrow, just a glimpse, something
Like a smile, reached for his wallet
And died.

Picture a woman. Sitting
On a bed, wary, the face next to hers. When she looked
At the ceiling it's flames and the body
Smouldering beside her. The meat
Wagon going away, cupping her small cries
In back.

Let Go

1
In another night nearly gone the sun
Crawls out of the mud. A few gray shells
Break open on the rocks, a few drunks
Wake to doorways, to fire
Rising from the gutters. A few open windows
And steam eats at the grates. Someone
Throws the last light
From a bar and below the freeway
The glow of headlights stops. The tide coming in.
A few holding each other, going home
In the rain.

2
Bob wakes
To blood and ashes in his mouth, to a burgundy
Moon, to the scraped and bleeding bricks. The cold face
In the pool is his. He tries to open
His eyes. One opens to heat, the other
Is sealed by blood-crust, fear,
The weeping flesh. The fingers
Of his left hand are crushed, five losing tickets, crumpled
Beneath him. Daily Doubles, $6 Combines, horses that broke dead
Last. The morning is another bet
Made on the flashing air, another junked car
In Columbia City.

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3
He cries softly, holds
The tears, thin and clear, in the back of his throat.
Grace. Warmth. A single room, a smouldering bulb,
Lying in the empty lot behind THE LUCKY DOLLAR
The soft puddles of dawn wash around him. He reaches
The stone wall of the alley
And sits up. His face is a tin cup of liver, torn
And spilling, a cup of split
Lips, splintered teeth, green glasses
And pails of wine. The bar is silence and pours
Around him like smoke, still and dark and distant.
He sees it hazily, drunk on pain, through one eye
And a socket of rust. A single gull
Flaps off a lightpole.

4
Once in Reno a train stopped
And a bum stumbled out
Of a boxcar, got to the streets,
Tried to pry a silver dollar out of cement. With his teeth
In his hand, digging for gold. The sheriff collected
Him, put him on the next train,
Wouldn't waste the bed or food. He threw him
Face first off the loading dock, with his hands locked
Behind him, tore his eyebrows
Off, peeled them back like boxtops.

Sitting in the grandstand, drinking
beer from a paper cup, the hollow coat holding him
down. Bet the chalk? Morning line
3 to 5. Might as well bet the Bobbed Tail Nag, kid,
The Old Gray Mare. Bet your age, the draft
card trembling in your pocket. Think you can win,
kid? Here?

Grinning at the finish
line. A man made of stink and tickets,
a leaning pile of words and sticks. Seat sprung,
laughing. Jet trails like veins broken off
above the tote board. Behind the hills are red birds, and
a fishhook cactus full of water. He had eyes like stones,
knew where he was going and left. For the valleys, kid,
where the living is easy, kid. Kid? You understand.

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5
A cat's song. A path
Through the dirt. They found the city
Full of light and money. Trucks
Rushing down the black roads, chains throwing sparks
On the ice. And monuments to the long dead. Those
Who died in snow for want of warmth and flesh
They could eat. The yellow brains of animals
Knew better and lived. Now in August
The stars are those forgotten
Names, cities, small towns, panes
Covered with dust and weeds that still shine
Whether we want them or not.

An Indian squats on the steep side
of a hill, beside sheep and a fire of fallen pine, looking
at the same stars. Looking into a dream. The land
and miles before him. Horns and whistles, a diesel's cough
somewhere out of sight. Gullies and rivers by the shimmering
hundreds. Oklahoma, Texas, mud in great, soft balls, taunts
and shacks, a woman sliding under him
without a face.

6
One shoe is gone, curled
Under the huge garbage bin. It laughs and he finds it
By crawling. Finds the money
Still in the toe. OK.
OK. Fuck it.
A man dressed as a woman
In a feathered hat, rouge and lipstick, heels
Black on white, and a purse held to his shaved belly, pauses,
On the sidewalk, looks full
At Bob, but doesn't stop. The whispers, the soft click
Of dice. The brown paper burning his hands. He pulls
The shirt around him like a shawl. It's OK.
Past the POST HOTEL, the dented signs, choking
On loneliness, and knives sharpening
The glass. He holds out a hand, feels
The scar of morning, holds on
To pawnshops, the alley's grillework,
Wooden railings. Falls and stands, stops
Only four times in two
And a half blocks.

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A cop slows,
Shines the light on him,
Sees that he is still on his feet and moving,
Speeds into the green glow and the twin moons
Disappear. At the end of the block
Brick opens to brick, to footprints in water.
The front door isn't locked, has no lock, no
Latch, no heart or home, no place
To stand or lie.

7
In the lobby the radiator rattles. The gray TV
Is a dead eye. Willy sleeps below it, ignores the shadow
Of the plane. His mouth is open. He breathes the stubble of heat.
His pants are open all the way to the leg's
Empty sleeve.

Grace
Is in the kitchen soaping his soft, white skin, the muscles
Gone to years and despair. Scabs float
In the clogged basin. The rolling city, the city
Where the rain never stops. He dreams
Of ships unloading the stiff skins
Of animals, dragging them
To the hoist, crane with a pig's snout, the thin
Legs of horses, cows baking
In the oven hold. The center of the earth. The swelling
Bole of copper and steel melts beneath his feet. He stops,
Opens the blistered door, scraps the layers
Of blood-scum from his gloves and apron. He watches the flat
Bottom of the pallet swing up in flames. A tiny square
Of light on the scorched ceiling.

8
There are worms in the stump
Of flesh, rotting meat and the smell. Sleep
Bob. Or cry. Put the ghosts
Away and don't let go. Wait
For Grace. There is a white stream
In her shoulder, a path to a well that goes
All the way to the bottom.

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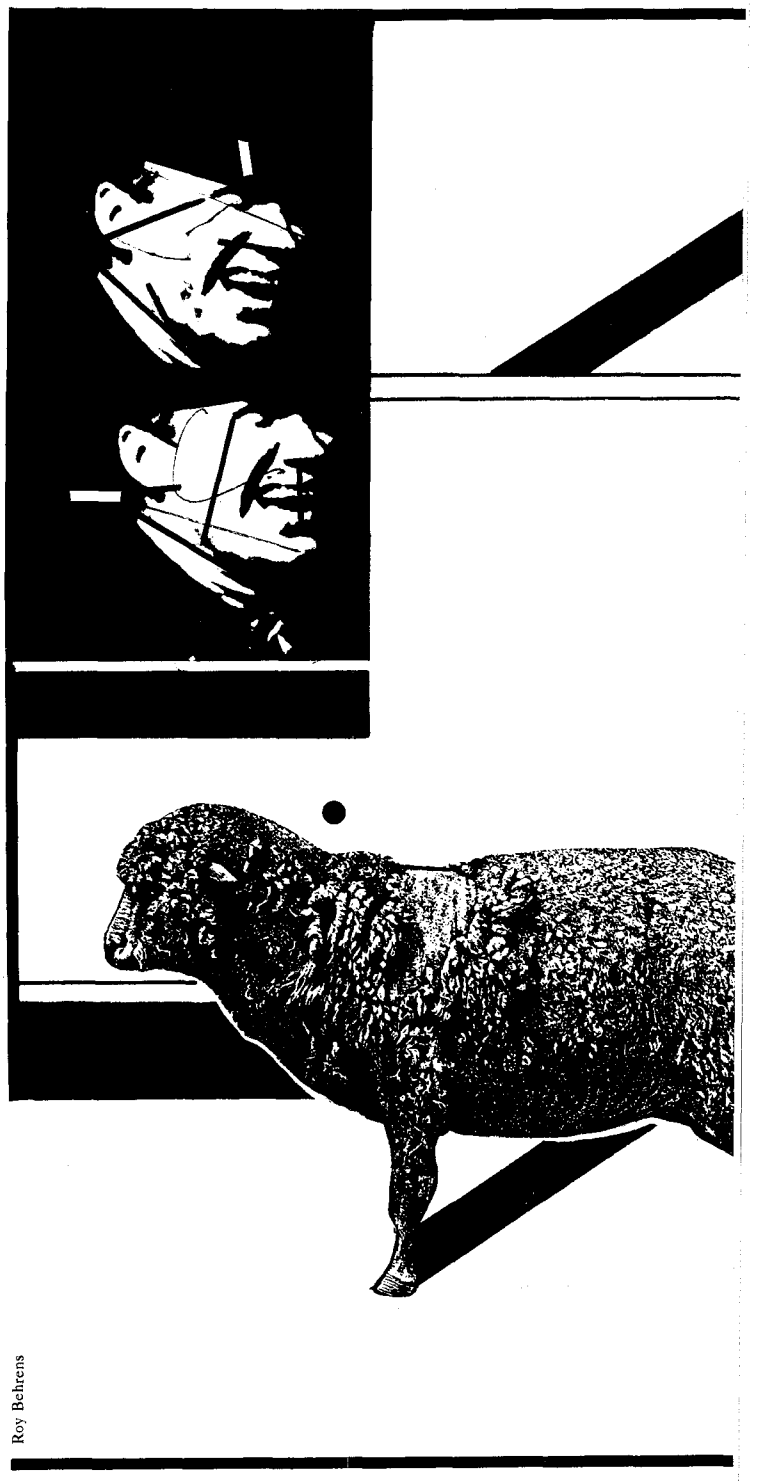
David James Duncan

HIS IDIOTS



Roy Behrens

It was early spring and misty the day he came to caretake the farm. His gear stowed, he slumped in a rocker at the window and watched the sheep in the distance—gray cloud-puffs grazing the green, transforming rough pasture to lawn. They were his first flock, his introduction to shepherdhood, venerable vocation of nomads and psalmists, of all wise watchers of herds. He left the cabin and strolled toward them, seeking, as with any new acquaintance, the eyes. He expected a pitiable stupidity, a lovable ignorance, an innocence worth the costs of feed and endless care. But as he squatted beside an ancient ewe, as he met for the first time that direct and all-uncomprehending gaze he was astounded: no preconception could foretell such unspeakable non-intelligence. Her yellow eyes were hideous. They understood nothing, never had nor would. Their sight was no perceiving: it was mere radar, a cold, bloodless faculty for determining locations of meaningless objects. The eyes didn't disappoint him: they repulsed him. He rose to escape them and had gone a little distance when for no reason the entire flock started and bolted madly away. Dried balls of dung clattered on their hindlegs and tails and he laughed at the sound. That was the first day. At first it seemed funny.

Weeks passed and he watched them. Sometimes they'd come to him, sometimes flee, but they came only in dumb hope of food and fled only out of habit. They might dash to their deaths but fear did not compel them. They had two supra-anatomical attributes each: hunger and stupidity. These two let nothing else—not even fear—enter their lives. He thought at first he saw some emotion in their movements, some actual alarm and fright. But that was at a distance. Closer he'd see the unchanging eyes—yellow, gawking, mindlessly calm—and remembering those eyes their liveliest body movements became the random eruptions of sub-animal whim, the operations of bleating machines, the deviations of huge woolly insects. And always the adorning excrement clattered out its imbecilic music. His laughter soon ceased.

There were two dozen of them. Then one day a dog came and barked. At this they tore, turds rattling, into the trout pond. Thirteen drowned. Because a dog barked. A small dog with a small voice. Now he had eleven—the survivors, the best swimmers, products of natural selection. It was weeks before their rattles dried.

An old stone wall protected the garden from the flock. Moss-covered and weather-stained, upright and unfailing, it had sheep-proofed flower, fruit and vegetable for a century. There were endless Achilles' heels on that farm, perennial sources of disorder—the rotting posts in the pasture fences, the diseased trees, the weasels in the chicken house, the tansy in the cattlegraze, the muskrats tunneling in the pond-dike. But the gray stone wall a given: like a hill, like rain, like seasons, it would serve. He looked once, admired it, and forgot it.

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DAVID JAMES DUNCAN lives in Milwaukie, Oregon, and is known to his neighbors as "the Lawn Ranger."

One dusk in late May he returned from town with a pick-up load of chicken scratch. His flock reclined in the garden, too glutted to stand. A mere dozen stones were tumbled from the wall, but through that fissure they poured like a plague of fleecy locusts, devouring the ripening strawberries, tiny stalks of corn, frail heads of lettuce, cabbage, broccoli, bell peppers, twisting tendrils of beans and peas, and no amount of work or money could restore the growing-time lost. The garden was destroyed, yet the sheep showed no guilt, no defiance, not even satiation or satisfaction: they simply drowsed, munching the last of his herb-garden, the same blank idiocy in the ugly yellow eyes. He stood by the wall, frozen with rage, cursing it for a traitor. He ran for a shovel and beat the sheep back to their fold. he fetched barbed wire and strung it in the gap, gouging his hands and thinking as he worked of the vast plains of Spain turned to desert by the grass-killing flocks. He thought of grizzlies and cougars hounded and shot out of existence, of eagles poisoned—vomiting out their entrails in flight, of wolves eating at their owned trapped feet, of coyotes nibbling baits that burst, shooting cyanide into their heads, of helpless cubs clubbed to death—all for the sake of these shit-encrusted zombies. He thought of David, of Christ—the impossibly good shepherds with their senseless compassion for these drivelling creatures. What a waste, the love of sheep. He finished the snarl of wire in the dark. It disfigured the wall like a rip in a painting, like a relic of the European War. He was pleased. He hoped the sheep would attempt to cross it.

He had wine for dinner, and mutton—one of the drowned. A one course meal. He gorged himself on it.

Long bitter days of replanting followed. But slow-burning anger lent its crooked inspiration and the work went fast. Before the garden was finished two ewes lambed; both bore twins, but only two survived. The burying of the dead lambs and the toddling dances and cries of the survivors cooled his anger, but he reminded himself that by winter all innocence would give way to the insectile ignorance of the full-grown. Still, he'd catch himself smiling at the lambs and the thought of them caught in the barbed wire began to nag him; so he bent at last to the task of repairing the breach in the wall.

On an early August morning after finishing the chores he decided to fix the breach before breakfast. He began by removing the wire. He then proceeded to drop the largest stone in the gap: to heave it into place took all his strength, and as the boulder thudded down it set an avalanche barking down into his shins. He writhed and snarled out the conventional curses.

He began again by placing the now numerous small rocks in the cracks. When he'd placed eight, thirteen came tumbling. They missed his shins but he cursed the same. Two constructive efforts and the breach was a sheep's length across now. He began again, more carefully, but it only took more time for the same result: avalanche. He swore softly now, confusedly, but crude and clear again as a clatter of dungballs announced his flock come to watch.

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He ignored them and began again. And again. And again and again, each time faster and more furious till frustration twisted at his head and empty stomach as the avalanches fell. When the breach was two sheep lengths, he ceased. A creeping desperation put an end to his curses. He pondered instead. The idiot flock remained, patient and watchful—even the lambs. Some stood, some reclined, some slobbered cuds, but all eyes waited upon him; he swore he'd make them his meat in due season.

But this day of this season he stood stymied and gaping like one of the flock, ogling the runestones scattered before him, the wall from whence they'd come but which now refused to readmit them, back at the stones, back at the wall, the stones, the wall, the stones. They were the same stones that had come from the wall, yet he could no more restore them than raindrops to clouds or days to bygone seasons. Even the sheep had done better than he: they'd made a small hole in accord with a gastronomically sensible intention. *He'd* made a huge hole with the intention of plugging a small one.

He stood long and silent among the ruins. At last it occurred to him to wonder that the wall had no mortar, no bracing, no tapering toward the top, nothing to hold it together—yet there it stood, impossibly erect and slender. At last he began to see the beauty of the wall and knew that before he'd seen nothing. He'd seen a wall-shaped stack of rocks, a wall like any wall . . . until it failed him. But its failure now forced him to discover that a century ago a man endowed with nothing but hands and a mind had composed this wall of nothing but rock and gravity. No stone had been placed at random. His barked shins cried out that no stone *could* be placed at random; they'd cracked against a work of art, an art called *drystone masonry*. And he lived in a land of barbed wire fences where the masons worked no more. Were this tumbled wall to stand again his hands must learn what their hands knew. He must find in each stone the center of gravity, for each gap the stone that would not shift as the weight upon it grew. From this rubble of fallen rock must rise a single, solid thing.

He began again. He picked up and contemplated a solitary errant stone. The sun and flock bore witness. From the work of seeing alone the sweat began to pour. Unmoving, he held that first stone long. At last he began to turn, to fondle, to shift it in his stupid hands, pondering moss and weatherstains like an illiterate goggling lines in a book. Slowly, painstakingly, he began to try it in place after place, at last letting it come to rest in the gap it seemed to fill as it filled no other. One by one, stone by stone he sought and fitted, doubted but strove to make from the many a whole. He placed three. He placed seven. As he laid them in he pushed and pulled them, jarred and tested. If they gave too easily he tried another. He placed eleven, placed fifteen, spending long moments huddled over each stone. At the sixteenth a piece of wall shifted and five fell out. No avalanche. Just five. His satisfaction was immense. He placed four, seven, nine more. He began to place first pairs, then triads, then larger combinations of stones that held in conglomerates as they couldn't hold alone. He learned to center the balance of each stone so that gravity pulled it *inward* and down, never outward. He said later that he began to sense in the most nearly perfect placements a kind of content, a relief, almost a pleasure in the stones themselves. He said it entered his hands, his arms, his back, his head, and without thinking he'd begun to sing. He said the song had no words and he sings poorly. But his flock listened.

Hours flew past, and birds. Again and again stones would fall, but always fewer. And always he'd feign detachment, feign an infinite patience, keep singing. His back grew weary, his hands scuffed but cagey. He lifted, shifted, pulled, shoved, balanced, tested, sweated, sang. The flock stayed on in the shade of the closest firs. The sun crossed the sky. The patience and detachment grew less feigned. Glimpsing his audience now and then, he began to marvel that they remained. He began to talk with them, and with the stones, to sing to them, to imagine in their eyes an idiotic interest. They watched, making no comment.

At last, unbreathing, with aching back and bleeding hands he placed the final stone. He tested it. The wall stood strong. He turned to his flock and made obeisance. He said both lambs bleated in reply.

He walked slowly to the trout pond. The entire flock followed. He said he knew they only wanted food. He said he thought he knew. But they watched as he swam, watched on as he dried and dressed, watched on as he rested in the shade of the firs and gazed at the green water. They had no reason for being there. They had no reason for being anywhere. So he said to himself. But there they were, watching. And as they stayed near he began to love them. He called them his idiots. They didn't mind.

He looked at the pond and he looked back at them. He said he began to see that they were like the pond—like water. Neither wise nor stupid, really. They simply had no thoughts. They simply were. That's all. He said he saw then that sheep and water are old, old things, that they'd been just as they are for a long time. He said he knew then that almost anything—trees, seasons, hills, walls, sheep, suns, waters—anything that old could teach him something.

Fall came, and a good harvest from the replanted garden. Winter came, and the two lambs became sheep without his noticing. He said that taught him that sheep are innocent as lambs, only uglier and larger. And he didn't know why, but from the day he restored the wall his idiots never tried to cross it. Their eyes stayed as blank and yellow. They continued to rattle as they ran. They remained the dumbest animals he'd ever met. But they were his idiots. He said that though they could never return the love of shepherds, there would be no shepherds without them. He said that though they couldn't quite make him a shepherd they had made him a drystone mason. And he said they at least let him glimpse the love of shepherds, with their patience like the wind. Like the wind that riffles flame, that flickers water, that caresses, coaxes, embraces—forever and perhaps for naught—even the stolidest of stones. □

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PETER WILD

JEANNE D'ARC

At night the horses kick the boards,
roll their eyes off by the tack house
as if hearing a flood, the bears
coming down from the peaks
after your apples and plums.
you lie there in the wilderness, in the midst
of the power beyond wealth, seeing them,
dyspeptic gorillas, humanoids from a bad film
tearing off branches in their lust, swinging
from pine to pine, remembering how
you flew them in over the ancient passes,
outwitting the clouds in the battered plane,
planted them with your wife in their little holes
around the abandoned tourist cabins,
all day carrying buckets of water that
foamed into mud when you poured them in.
now like prisoners escaped they
are sneaking around the barn, closer
behind the tractor with its seized engine,
at last crawl under the fence, eyes sparklers
reach out with the hairy gloves of their hands
for the first fruit of the striplings,
so sweet you would eat them with wine,
knowing you have done everything, hung bells
from the eaves, stung them with flashing strobes,
when they drew back, fingers in their mouths
to come again, running out in your underclothes
to chase them with boards. at last
unable to sleep, you stake
your thin wife out by the ankles, naked
in the old irons, Jeanne d'Arc
shivering, dressed only in straw flesh,
who sets herself aflame
singing new songs to the darkness,
and struggle awake toward morning to find her
lying cold in her ashes like some old
snag that has burned for hours
toward the dawn, once touched by lightning.

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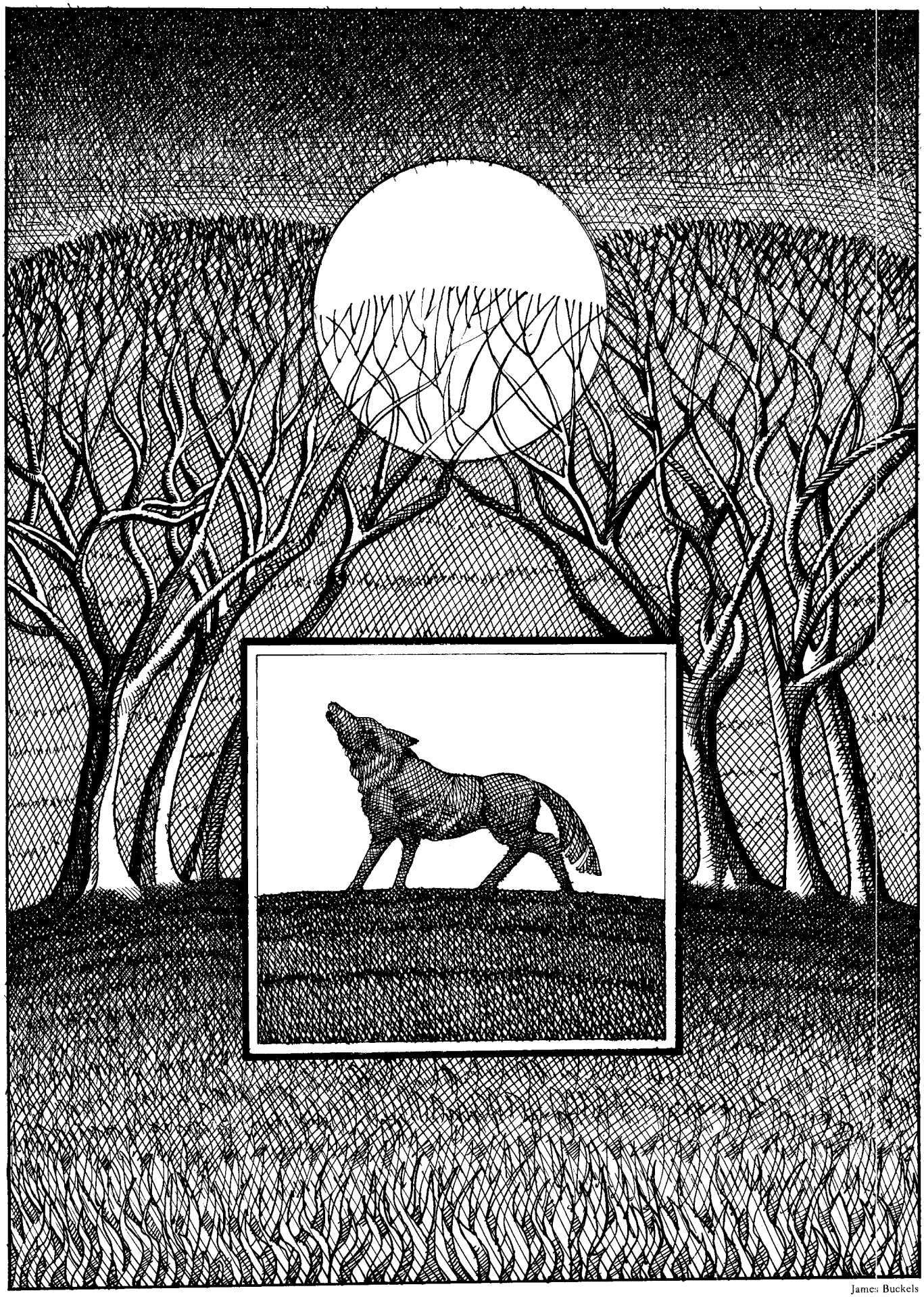

James Buckels

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THE GAUNT WOLVES

BESMILR BRIGHAM is a poet and fiction writer from Arkansas. She is a frequent traveler to Central America.

BESMILR BRIGHAM

Up from the river "bottoms," Helen could hear the gaunt wolves crying. Their thin whines came wailing from near edge of the Cossatot, from dense banks and tangled woods, where hunting dogs strayed and became lost—often submerged sound lifted through the brief clearing.

Close to time of winter . . . driven down by North fierce hunts, the wolves circled the soggy bush that people called bottoms; their cries were of another time, the thick grown-into fields—from a richer country, place fat with bloody flesh and beef.

Lying on the old-springs mattress, bed in house she and Paul had converted to their house that her father years past had used to brood chickens in, Helen felt her life thrown from circumference—as the displaced wolves had been.

"They chatter all night," a neighbor told her, "but most of all as the moon goes, on the edge of morning."

"I hear them before I sleep—always," Helen said.

A ferocity of hunger and strangeness—encroaching; the hurt of their carrying barks and still plaintive whines was of a transposed lank existence. A whipped sound, extreme in intensity, subjective and of distress, and a meanly sound as though in demand and begging—the unrestrained emotion of revolt. The wolf was a strange beast and a threatened one, that ran in packs—came up pitiless out of secure woods to cut leg-tendons of cows and young colts, and led off cattle dogs to the kill. Calves could not be made safe, or the few goat herds; in bad times they entered people's yards, enticed the house dog—a violent mating, carried off chickens . . . but chased by all and brutal hunts organized against them, their destiny lay in other hands. And their sounds of this time had a beggarliness in them. As little animals made when caught in the skin trap.

Often low and gentle.

A prolonged surge-up from the heart and belly, sorrowful, full of grief and pain—Helen thought, shut away from them. The low river land was to the wolves like a refuge where lonely men gathered, from the sorrow of their lives; a wailing wall that a change in existence and a few miles, perhaps, made to close the security of man off from. If men were secure.

Paul slept unaware of them. In the big house her father slept. Her mother also, she supposed. The wolves never bothered them. Though often her mother was awake—and from her own window Helen could see the larger house her parents lived in flared with lights. Old Abe was sick—couldn't get his breath; his heart pained him, and he took a little strychnine. And Bett would get up, read her Bible while the heater burned, a watch against death . . . acceptance and fear of it.

Helen couldn't understand the individual difference.

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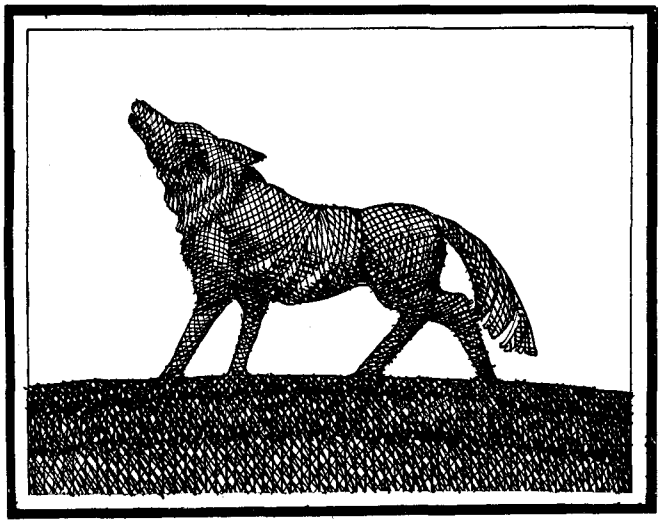
How easily the old man could fling the broad head of a rabbit against a tree trunk, tear the legs limp from bloody ribs, lean shrunk-part that was belly and loose flanks. Hack with a kitchen knife and throw the pieces on the ground, yelling "Dogs—dogs," call the fat house cats. Bring the axe down on a white duck's neck as though cutting a cabbage from its root, while the convulsed body jumped in its feathers. The earth, living things were for his use; only the human death lay in consciousness.

Poor Bill Barnes had passed away, Bett would say. Or, "she's gone from us," when May Bell Clark died of cancer. Sitting in the drug store half of a Saturday in booths with old women, waiting for the ticket drawing, charged as a radio never turned off—God and Sin and Silver Sun linings, no joy and no sorrow (there was no room for Joy or Sorrow). The past flashed its electric current through each of them and the near past blurred with static phrases. "Since Pauline left us" . . . taboo words, taboo thoughts. They could not use the word dead.

Yet the "passed" ones were dead. A cemetery of dead. Where did they go—old Gilbert, after a tree fell on him; Barnes whose feet and legs rotted when the blood stopped. Ellis Wright, crushed under a double-wheel truck jacked up with the motor running—and Stella Vaughn, who when Wright died after four months in the hospital drove on loose gravel. Dead as her mother's mother, or Helen's old uncles and aunts.

"I think he's had a light stroke. Abe can't think of things and I can't make him go to the doctor," Bett wrote. Helen knew she should call, but she didn't. "Okay if you come home in October . . . ?"



("We have to go—" Paul said. "Don't you want to get home before your father dies?"

"My being there won't stop it." If he died, she'd go back to help her mother. Helen didn't know what she'd do about her mother. "Mama just wants us to come home."

"I want you to leave while you can—" hadn't her father told her that? And though the car wasn't loaded until dark, they had left—for a trip back to Mexico. But the hard winter had then passed; Helen thought they *could* go.

"Can't you see that I need you?" Bett cried.)

As though she and Paul could give up everything—! Even away, Helen felt a pressure from her parents. She couldn't run from her mother's face that in remembrance broke in sudden quivers . . . the hands seemed thrown out to her. What a tight life to be drawn back to. What did any of it have to do with her?—and one day she had said it, "I feel I was never born in this house."

"What's wrong with this house?" Bett's face white. "We gave you what we could."

Books and her own life had changed her. "I saw a way and thought, but I found no life that was similar to what I found in the books . . . for a long, long time."

"Of course not—" so exact, full of anger.

"There was no freedom," Helen said, "unless we fought and made it, for any of us. But we never made it. Not I, or my brothers." And her mother's mad old bitterness rose, "What freedom?"

"Freedom of thought," Helen said.

"If that's what you mean, I don't know what you wanted freedom for. Unless it was to get away from God—" the existence of deity. "You've never been hurt," she said. To her mother, Helen didn't exist . . . she was like Old Abe, old when she was born, wanting now to leave home, go off in his second-hand car. Eighty-three years old and the will for life couldn't kill him. He talked about warm coast places and Meskito Indian country he had known south of Yucatan—the Carib coast and Central America.

"What is it like down there now?" he'd ask.

"About the same," Paul spoke easily to the old man. "Life in a place like that—forty, fifty years wouldn't make much difference. A little worse off maybe, the people are—since the Somoza industry concentration has moved to the west." Because her father wanted to hear about Nicaragua, where he lived from 1900 until his twenty-eighth year, and returned home. It represented a bright human part of Abe that to them made him lovable.

"Bluefields used to be a lively place," he remembered. Bluefields, the *Rio Escondido* (hidden river). Coast and town he'd worked out of, replanting little mahogany shoots, following the cutters. . . . "Ships waiting for bananas, waiting for sugar."

"You have to wait now for a tramper to get out," Helen said, though she knew Abe went on with his dream.

An influence of her father that she and Paul had ever gone to Mexico or further south. When she was a child, he told her of the people, terrain, created a world that became essential to Helen: it was her past which was also his past, which had grown of itself heavy and personal.

A part of her own tightness coming back to this house. An open-ness she had felt that she could not get back to and to keep something of what she had known, she played a reality game—to lie in her bed and think of other beds, other houses . . . wondering if, should she suddenly open her eyes, might she not about her find the Ark woods' house. Where rains filled streets and drain-offs, flowed inside the walled garden even with the high door-stoop, and covered the elevated back patio. Until there was no rain and the earth grew flush with bushes—plants that

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small blooms came out from. Big watery leaves, so that they called the house and grounds the Garden. A garden of beginnings. Walls crude as where she lived now, holes and wide cracks where the moonlight was let through and where on dark nights stars seemed to sit on the roof. Sudden sparks that gleamed against the uneven tiles. A warm place, always a warm place

. . . she looked up and a liquid red cross hung near the short white curtains. Windows to the side and back, a three-foot horizontal section the whole length of the room left open in front for light, covered with mesh wire; in winter, sealed over with plastic. Beside a shelf, above the bright apostle's cross, was hung the Carib guitar. Near a painting on wood Paul had done for her of the thorn-tree Christmas, from a lonely time one year when the thorn tree was the only 'green' they could find. A small carved *cano-a* some child had lost; and a shell, delicate as sea glass.

From the shell, a long-stem flower lifted. The flower had fallen dried from above entrance gates to a town in the Cloud mountains. Where the sign read: "Welcome—sons of the King." She never knew what it meant. Sons of man, as children of God. Something like that. The hand-laid rock road, rocks the size for little burro hooves, thrown full with leaf sprays and decaying flowers. She thought of orange-yellow field flowers, green hill-plants and mountain laurel that smelled sweet with gardenias and marigolds—monastery where *Monjas*, the nuns and young priests, made October wreaths.

Nothing warm here. Even this long two-room structure that she also loved, looking straight out on cattle-graze pastures and in the distance woods—now felt cold. Log-cuts in the heater had burned out, but she didn't get up to rebuild the fire . . . let the night pass as other nights had passed; until at last it was morning—

in country where from early spring the earth grew much like the little chosta *they called the Loving Heart, house in the coffee sierra . . . Fort of the Flowers*. Fortin de las Flores. *Her father's own life spent in a similarity of dreams—as though living itself was and made the wonder: to hold in beauty or the remembrance of. Until a time came that she and Paul could return to themselves, she could use what her mother might call a transposed imagination . . . as her father had done! To keep touch with herself.* To retain that singular reality of what she had seen, experienced, and felt to be their own. Hers and Paul's.

Across the yard, she heard a truck drive in—it must be near two o'clock, she thought . . . they had waited in the big house until eleven for men to come from the chicken plant, to pick up a load of Old Abe's hens he was selling. The great haul truck, that would be stacked with cages, had eased through the far side gate into the driveway . . . was pulling to the back. It wasn't a loud noise, Paul didn't wake. And then she heard her mother call out. Her mother would be leaning from the door, lonely above the steps looking into the dark; and the truck motor stopped.

"What are you doing, coming here this time of night?" Helen as from far off, hearing her mother's strained half-awake voice.

"Sorry, Ma'am," from deep in the yard.

"Why didn't you come on earlier?"

"We had to wait for the big truck to get in . . ." and both voices trailed off; other sounds as the heavy loader pulled in gear farther away toward the barn and chicken lot.

"Dad," Bett would call, "get up—Dad." And though she didn't hear her father come out or the back door slam, Helen knew he had—. Hurrying in his old winter coat (in front of the driver's high cab), the worn overcoat that he got up nights wearing; he would be standing out there directing the driver how to get close to the roost-house. She heard Abe's car start up and move—he must be re-parking it, driving, maneuvering past the clothes line . . . for the head beams to give light. The moving car and unwieldy truck, moving forward from reverse, threw sudden flashes—a dim luminance all the way across the yards of the two houses, past feed barrels, over the division fences from the chicken house and barn. Through the glass and horizontal side window curtains in bright flares it lay above the kitchen and ceiling of boxed-in closet area; Helen watched the lifting brief color shifting on high beams and cross strips beneath the whole long tin roof . . . looking up at the diminishing and clarifying shapes. And she wondered how Paul could sleep. (Men brought crates and weighed the disturbed chickens—she didn't know, maybe the whole load was figured and weighed at the processing plant.) Until suddenly, the dogs set wildly to barking, waked and scurrying in primitive excitement after the car.

"I'd better get up," Paul said.

But Helen didn't move. "What is there to stay in bed for—?" as he put his hands on her. He seemed distant to her as the wolves. "If we lie here, in the morning it would be as though we never waked," he said softly. Questioning the concern in his face, but she didn't move to receive him and he drew back. She watched as he threw aside the covers, pushed them doubled in a lump and sat on the outer mattress edge tediously pulling his pants on over the bulky pajamas. Straightening, he stood up and jerked at the fly gap in anger—stuffing the outing top in. "If I don't hurry that damned bell will ring," he said.

His very movements as she watched made Helen cold—

Her parents kept an old brass cow bell in Abe's room . . . and if they wanted anything, Bett clanged on the bell. When it was cold and wet and the old man couldn't go out to feed his hens—the two houses ran to their time; Bett rang for Paul.

"He'll get sick out in that rain," once Abe objected, "same as I would," following to the door. "Are you all right, do you have warm enough clothes on?" he asked, trying to say what he couldn't, standing in the door holding the screen open as Paul went down the caked icy steps. "Be careful," and Paul turned, turned on the steps. He loved the old man. He looked thinner than he was—wrapped in dirty slicker with black rain hat. "He's almost down with the flu, Helen—is he doing anything for it?" Abe standing on, door flared wide, letting the rain that was almost sleet blow in.

"I don't know," Paul was now deep in the yard . . . she kept sitting on the arm of Abe's big chair next to the

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open door, waiting for Paul to come back; she'd need to help count the eggs.

"Honestly—" Bett came warm from the kitchen, "Dad, shut the door!" She wasn't large, or heavy . . . a thickening had set like early pregnancy, as it does in women— "Helen, I can't tell you and Paul apart. I thought you were Paul sitting there. In that hat and coat—with those pants, I have to look twice," laughing and she bent close to look out at the rain. "Can't you two keep the door shut?" but Abe kept standing in it. To Helen, her mother looked like a fat she-cat, dainty and protesting, feminine with her hair curled—all female; she'd never noticed how fragile her mother was, not exactly mature, feline and womanly . . . face fresh, flushed as in girlhood and as though she had come from a bath. She walked in those little dry slippers the way a cat does, not to get mud on its feet.

"He's waiting to let Paul back in—" Helen wished she hadn't taken off the rain hat and had gone back out, made tea on the electric hot plate.

"Should I build a fire?" Paul asked.

"No. I'll just lie here."

"Dammit honey, I wouldn't go—but that old man out there in that cold and it's past midnight, catching those chickens. He's too old to be crating chickens. What if he has a heart attack?"

"I thought men from the processing plant would catch them."

"It wouldn't make any difference. He'll work hard as any of them." And so will you, Helen thought . . . Paul chopped fire blocks from the fallen tree, carried heavy cans of water to their house, climbed the roof and spotted rust places with tar, re-opened the drain from the septic tank when that filled up—tore Abe's car engine apart; and maybe all that work was good for him. But it seemed to Helen he threw himself off in work, as though he were beating his life out.

"I'll build a fire," he said, "it's cold as hell in here."

. . . Not as cold as that winter the house pipes froze and butane tank was low. It hadn't snowed yet. She and Paul came for a month then, arrived Christmas and couldn't get away. And her father's car with the insurance running out. Old Abe drove to the corner crossroads, where a cut-off made a kind of wooded square below the main blacktop . . . and with the old Chevy at high point on the hill, Abe got out to check tires. The wiring was on fire. He hadn't put the brake on and the car lurched, raced down the steep cut, swaying between trees, and across the lower gravel road up into the yard of Pisgah church—belched in reverse. Settled back in a little open hollow. Abe ran on the south road fork and just as she spit her last fire threw a rock into the windshield. Other than the wires and windshield "—Nothing happened to the damn car," he said.

("Paul—" Abe shouted, back at the house. "We've got to make out a report. The wreck!"

"But we've just started to eat dinner," Bett said and Abe went out the front door, slamming the screen. "He'll catch a ride, somebody will take him on to the store. It wouldn't surprise me—" sitting back down at the table, "racing off, right before he knew I'd have the food ready . . . said he was going to Parker's for tobacco. Do you think Dad could've fixed the wires so they'd catch on fire?"

"I don't know, Mom," Paul said. But he told Helen, "I saw him tinkering with the motor.")

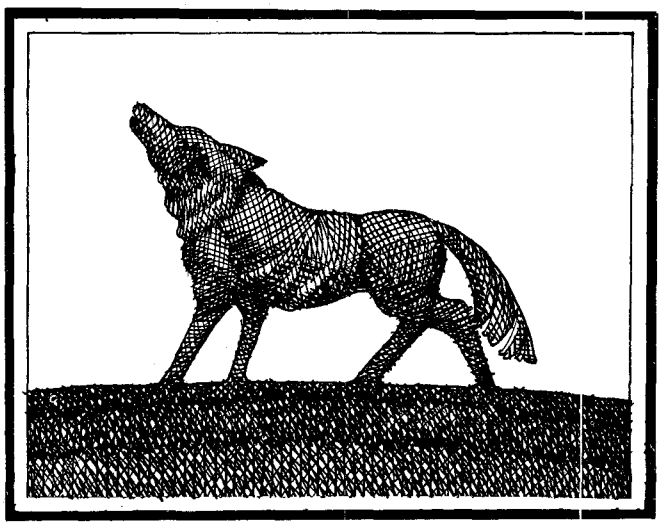
The week after that the big snow came. And it was almost a month before an insurance agent was out to investigate. The man asked a lot of questions and Old Abe sobered to such honesty, Paul was afraid he wouldn't get a dividend . . . joined them in the front room and made a straight account of it. At last the investigator estimated the old man's age, put his doubts in his briefcase and (as he told Paul) decided that even if the burning wires were set with gasoline—that too was an accident.

Helen with Bett had waited in Abe's back porch-room. "And the company will replace the windshield?" she asked.

"He told me he would," Paul said.

"But the hole looked so evident!"

"Like he said, there were big rocks on the road and from the way the car lurched—" Paul seemed tired of it,



"well, Helen, we don't know do we? He threw the rock, but unless Abe came out direct, unless he said he threw the rock . . . he left the motor on, the wheels must have been turned—and he had the shift in high, he did say he kicked her. He's a bungling old man and after all if the company wants to pay, it was—just as I told the man, either way, something Abe could not be sure about. Nobody saw what happened—"

"It was an accident he didn't ride down in it," Bett said.

"Abe thinks it was an accident it didn't hit one of those trees and the whole car wasn't torn to pieces," Paul laughed. (He was an old man, age had beaten him, and it was difficult for any of them to get into his mind. Like stuffing the chickens with food all day because they were to be sold. They'd weigh more, he said. And the fool chickens eating like a holiday. Abe had made a trip to town especially for the corn. Regular mixed feed digested faster, the hens were used to it and didn't eat as much.

"He had to buy the corn," Bett defended.

"He's not making the hens eat it!" Helen said.)

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Stupid hens, thinking of their bellies, and in the morning to be strung up and their necks cut, hung by the throat, squawking and flapping as the distributor machine moved . . . and a man, mechanical as a part of the machine, reached out, cut the brain cord—power-slipped the perpetual chain. Monotonous as motions the hens made, filling their gullets with corn. Their bodies not rough or their lives hard, not like the wolves at all.

Though a few slept in trees, some in the two tall pear at back of the house; and in the persimmons. Yet from past the chick age, particular hens refused to take to the poultry barn . . . a little more gaunt, a little more wild. Afraid of the black snake that slithered in and lay on the rafters, afraid of the weasel that crept close to an unprotected throat, body sleeping in feathers. The coon that moved quietly as dark, the o'possum, creatures the house dogs made racing alarm for. Afraid even of the dogs' barking. The hens made a little off-clan with a couple of roosters, that took early to the trees for survival and left the barn where feed flowed from bulk in hanging containers; and they hunted farther in the day time in the deep grass, built their nests away from the designated laying rows. Nesting in hampers and boxes Abe nailed up in the dead orchard. Or went to stray places they could find—a rusted iron stove, behind a set of cast-away bedsprings that leaned against the garden fence. In part, they hunted their own domains where a fertile hen could lay all the eggs she had from inside her and keep them, set on them—and the roosters ran after. The fat barn flock, safe and out of the weather, content . . . one like the other, fertilized their bodies with fast-grow pellets, and multiplied with eggs. Not laying any more, these now squawked for their lives against the cages and catchers. . . .

Sometimes, turning on the hi-fi—listening to Afternoon of a Faun, the Firebird, knowing alone this other developed in the human heart, she knew also she was living at its source. The house was a cage with windows and despite the multiple light, a darkness stayed, as though the daily, hourly flow-in of the actual, the feeding, the sleeping, waiting for age—arriving at age, the physical growth and perpetuation were all. But the hi-fi stood, its speaker dead, and there was nothing came in from anywhere.

She and Paul could cut themselves off, but Helen had returned here and to her parents; separate from them—to her, the singular life remained drawn up and warped. She owed too much on their terms! What she had found did not matter. They lived like the cut, high grass dying—the tall hay-grass Paul had slashed down with a bush-hogger around this place. The grass rotted, and winter quickened the time for rot. Rotted and fertilized and seeded itself. A new life continuously kept growing from the old . . . for the human animal did not give way so easily to generations. What did she get with all this? Nothing seemed clear to her. Beyond the bounds of the Cossatot, there was no existence that affected her, unless she made one. To dig the life out from the background of one's own life—to do that here . . . such work could only be done in singleness. And she was bound to Paul also and a man needed his own thought and feeling. As though substance had to take its own breath and find its own boundary, but Helen's "old" set their boundary and the wings fluttered futilely. . . .

It seemed a long time before Paul came back. The wood he had stoked the heater with had burned down and, stooping with his weather coat still on, he stirred the few remaining coals and sticks. Helen watched as he put in more sharp cuts from the hackberry that had fallen. "It won't make a warm fire," he said—"but we'll need the harder wood when it snows. Want to get up?—I can't sleep now." And she sat across from him and watched as his face relaxed. (The cold went, but the feeling of cold remained on them. The truck had driven off, coops crowded with white feather chickens, and the house dogs no longer flayed up the air with sound.)

"What's the matter with us, Helen—?" he asked.

At first, she didn't answer; it was too immediate, and for all her thought she didn't know. "It's the wolves, I think. They sound so desolate. I couldn't sleep for listening to them. . . ."

"Oh. When I first woke up, you were listening to the wolves?"

"I'm not afraid of them—"

"When the wolves are howling, one doesn't have to worry," he said. "It's when they are silent that the pack comes up for the hunt—"

("Perhaps," she said.

"And it's when for a long time, you are silent and quiet with me . . . nobody can get to you. I can't reach you," Paul sat very still, "I reach out—" he seemed completely disturbed, away from her in the big chair.

"It's like somebody's always watching," she said, away from him. From the low cut-off seat where she usually stayed near to the stove, she leaned against the wall back of her . . . and he got up, stooped and put his hands on her.

"There's never anyone to disturb us—" his hands, not leaving from above her knees, pressed into her. "Even in the daytime, your dad coughs when he comes to this house—they never come on us suddenly; they leave us alone."

"Everything seems strange to me," she said. It was like expecting a bell to ring—even now. Being observed, or not being observed to give one freedom. Yes her father coughed, and what was this secret against intrusion? "Please don't," she moved from him, and Paul took his hands away. He kept looking at her, but she didn't respond . . . after awhile, he got up.

"I don't love them in there," Helen said. "I don't love either of them. I can't. I don't know when it happened. It is nothing they did to me. I can't love them as though I were a child anymore, because I'm not a child—and there's not been anything to replace it. And yet, they both completely involve me, every pattern near normalcy that I take.")

"We're supposed to respect our parents," she listened to his reasoning. "For themselves, or as other human beings, I suppose."

"They are a part of us," she said. "They are a part of me, but I'm not a part of them. . . ."

"Oh, I think you are, Helen."

"No, I'm like the wolves . . . I'm as different to each

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of them as the wolves are. I think as the wolves think or some other wild thing; to them, I do. And I'm as destructive. I discount the strong nails that hold the boards of their not very solid house together. My being as I am (because I am not like them) makes their certainty uneasy."

"Neither of them has much certainty. . . ."

She saw in his face she was exaggerating. "I don't go to church. I never have; not grown I haven't. I keep a Catholic cross," but religion was abstract. "I'm not even Catholic," she said. Bett's minister, old Maynard, had told her all Catholics went to hell . . . was she going to Hell? Probably—she thought. Helen kept talking—"Oh, what do they have to do with it, anyone here?" She felt completely disturbed.

She knew Paul wanted more than sex, he wanted love. (He wanted to love and to be loved and he remained simple as a child for it.) Paul was not all mixed up, as she was; or she didn't think so. But she didn't like to be touched . . . or if she were it had to be all shut off, and secret. An animal secrecy. Not like her mother—her mother had always been more open than she was . . . remembering as a child her mother calling, "Honey, would you wash my back—" (and Helen had to take the warm wet rag into her hands, rub up and down the big shape of the grown-up back that was fleshy and soft, while her mother squatted or sat in the tub. Reach down, trying not to touch her mother, to get the rag wet, hold it past the breasts she tried not to look at . . . always, as she would chance to see her mother dressing, the breasts remained big and full as a woman nursing and the little knobs of them bright as a fruit, pink—until even she was old. And then the woman's hand took hold of the cloth.) Bett had brought it back. Only a few days ago, coming wet and damp out of the bath, loose in the soft blue robe Helen had given her. "It's such a pleasure to bathe," her mother had said. "I like to lie down all the way in the water. That's how I know my back gets clean—" her voice sounding wet and submerged, all in itself. "It always bothered me, not able to get my back clean," a fastidiousness as though even in bathing she was set apart.

"Do you know how the wolves sound to me?" Helen asked. "They sound like children crying . . . their whines are so still." Children that cried of their childhood, helpless in their childhood, and she wondered—do we cry for that? Cry of our childhood, because of it or for it. She didn't suppose anyone could cry for his childhood, actually. And the wolves, they weren't crying *for* their childhood either. . . . "Their whines are so still," she said.

Paul pulled himself straighter in the chair. He had made coffee, trying to stay awake, "Wolves are more vicious," he said.

"Than people—?"

"Yes," he was back with her.

"Wolves are supposed to be vicious and people not. But since we never know wolves, we can't tell . . ." she decided.

"I've been listening," his thoughts seemed elsewhere, "and I think I have come upon it, what makes you strange to me. This year—since we've been back. Please listen . . . is it something I said to you? Is it because I said you come from this house? One day, I did say that. 'You come from this,' isn't that what I said?" and something within her went quiet. The brain lay like a great snake coiled, held short—the feeling-out from emotion. Responses, set in place from the entangled woods of childhood that no age and no recognition completely erased. The mind could not be tempered past the wavering back, a dog howling at the moon, the coil unwinding in in-set patterns, or revolt. Beyond reasoning. And though she didn't remember Paul saying the words (for time here folded over to more than remembrance, injustices, hurts, former confusions—and a hatred against all the narrowness, boundness and limitations), the statement could have affected her. Born in anger, she felt herself grown to a woman's age in a lost unfinding place.

"When we were first married," Paul drew her back, "I felt the same way about my house. When I took you home with me. My mother was dead, but she wasn't dead to me. My father had killed her, I thought . . . of course he didn't. Not actually—and I knew that. I saw them through what I thought were your eyes, and I was ashamed of them. I saw their ignorance; it was an insensitive life, not what I wanted, and not what yours was."

"You argued, I know. Very lightly. I couldn't understand your ease in arguing. Like a kind of sport, or game. . . ."

"My father and I, yes. He was a clown, ignorant and wholesome and stupid. Except for a few times when I was a boy, I never saw him angry. Not angry at the world or what happened to him; and he didn't get himself wrought up at people either. Do you know how he died, Helen?"

"Not much," she said. "No one told me much about it—"

"He came in from the field and cow lot. He was sixty-eight. There had been two strokes with his heart."

"We went once, didn't we? He was in the hospital then. Everybody came. . . ."

"Not one of us had the money to pay the hospital bill, and the hospital wouldn't let him out until the bill had been settled. Ed and Maurine signed notes for it. Ed said they weren't going to let 'our daddy' suffer like that. He took on the notes, and Maurine our oldest sister signed with him; the rest of them split up the bill and made notes to Ed for it. Nobody asked me to sign anything—"

"You didn't have a part in the notes?" she asked.

"What was the use? If I had signed the hospital note, I'd have paid it. As the first son, it was my place to do that. But Ed wanted to be a 'big shot' and took over everything. And I wouldn't have signed a split-up note to Ed if he had asked me. It was a big show! Nobody has paid a cent on that bill yet."

"And was that why your Dad didn't go to the hospital when he died?"

"Fortunately, he didn't need to. He just came in from his work, bent over to wash his face in the wash pan, and fell . . . our step-mother Ethel had been married to him for fifteen years, and Ed won't have her in his house now. She worked with and for Dad, and she was as poor as he was. They worked in the field together like two old mules. Ethel ran to him—but he was dead before she could lift him to the bed . . ." Paul stopped. (Helen felt

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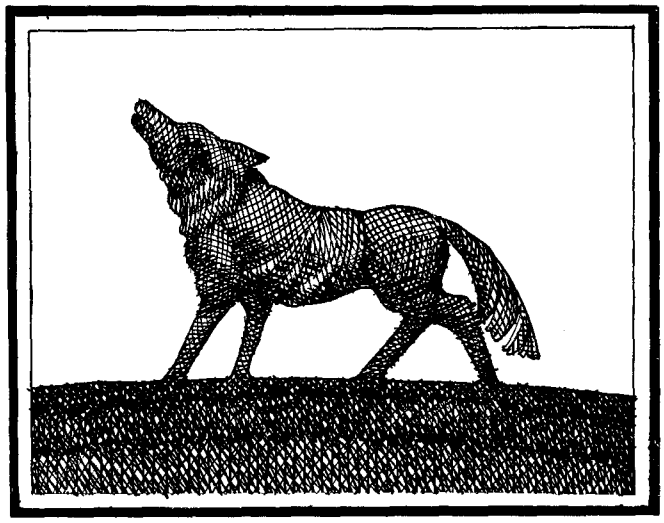
completely out of herself; she wondered with what dispassion he spoke of it.)

"Nobody knew where I was, or either of us—" Paul said. "I don't know now myself. Ed told me about it later, and my Dad would have gotten a kick out of this. I never knew him to go to church; he was past sixty before he thought about it. But in the last years he had started. A little country church. In Oklahoma. Out of Lawton, I think. He must have carried the fear of hell into his going, and the congregation made him a deacon. At the funeral, there was such a crowd the church overflowed and it was raining. So the pastor asked Ed if he thought it was all right to move the casket into the big school house instead. Last time I saw Ed, not having the funeral in a church still bothered him. Did I think it was okay? he said. Well, I thought it was 'okay'; I thought . . . hell, Helen, what's the difference! I thought it damned appropriate. The pall bearers took him prepared in his casket to the auditorium at the school house and even the class room halls filled with country people getting out of the rain. . . ."



(It would have been a fine thing to see, Helen thought.

"What I'm trying to say is that after awhile none of it means much to you. Like people you never knew. Not a part of your life anymore. We fill up with something else.")

When Paul opened, when he talked to her without holding back, he made the intuitive sense of their life real. Related in some way—from romantic novels Helen had read in high school, it seemed near to her to a soul seeking its fortune. That had nothing to do with wealth or money or what one could hold in one's hands, but with what fortune held—days spent on a wide earth.

Yet, sleeping did not hold true with it, and she dreamed. Helen often dreamed. Places like great maps, and she remembered the places, often from other dreams. Interior and exciting, that opened to her. A strange continent, shaped like a south terrain, with the big shoulder bulge of the other America—beyond the equator, and a river running deep into it under the ribs. A channel cutting into the land through the clean backbone mountains, ending against a thick green-sand coast. But the whole upper cut-off part lay covered in deep snow, not hardened, deep soft resilient snow; and men in boats went through the channel, passed long days circling the hulking mountains, the sleeping body and head. Even the boats drifted light with snow, under snow flurries, soft sweeps like flakes, and the sun poured glistening from the white—on the water and on the land . . . the snow didn't freeze or make the bones cold. She saw the faces of men in the boats and that icicles did not hang from their hair, but near to sleet the ice furred over them. And she knew that this was a dream and the men did not hurt from the cold because they were dead. . . .

In dreams Helen tried to find touches of her life in sleep and from where she and Paul went—though she could at times find no association; for this was the imagination, she thought, quickened stronger than reality to her, and she left it free. She would not go into it. The waking mind tied itself with reasons, but asleep the bright snake unfolded its wings and flew over the world quietly as thought.

Two men were fighting. Animal-human things. They fought as creatures did struggling on the TV in her mother's house, where everybody looked at it and there was no blood. Often she wondered, should the directors show the blood and what it was dying—just once (as in war), if the big glimmering glass in the machine wouldn't break and the RIGHT, JUSTICE, the TRIUMPHANT scream, wounded as an animal out of the hot tubes. (Words without image and dead mouths where no blood came.)

The men in the dream fought without guns. They fought with their bodies and hands, struggled and tore with their teeth and tasted of fright in their mouths.

One stood in the door of his house and the other wanted to enter. For awhile, Helen felt inside them, then she drew apart . . . the men hit at one another, beating with their arms and legs, and she saw an arm joint come loose. The ribs broke and pushed through so that blood came out of the flesh and wet their clothes; and with their heads and their bodies, in their movements like wild things, each protected his throat. A foot dangled, broken from its hinge, the bone showing. Until at last, the man defending his place, his shelter, the man keeping what was his killed the other and for a long time both men lay still.

Then the live man tried to get up; he tried to raise himself, and when he did lift his body to all-fours, he gripped the dead thing that was left against his chest and with a pain that seemed a part of the dead man, dragged it. (Except for the moving held-alive head, they became as one near-dead object dragging, pulling itself along in its own bleeding earth.) The live man tugged at the other, and slowly brought its weight deep under the floor of his house, under the wooden structure and low foundation posts and left it in the dry dust hidden there.

And he crawled from under the floor into the yard again, raised himself to the steps and half-stood to go in. Exhausted, he sat on an old box inside of the house, leaned his back against the board wall away from it.

A plank in front of the man lay loose in the floor. Loose the way the heavy 12-inch board strips were in Abe's chicken barn, where her father pulled with the rake to

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clean roost poles . . . dragging the loads of chicken droppings to make the fumy piles of manure dust with thickened scabs, that would fall through the hole as he shifted and pushed and unnailed pieces awry. He let the mulch spread out there under the gawky opening. It wouldn't get wet; dry, it would only slowly decay. And with spring he'd pull the fertilizer out again to spread over with damp ground, make his warm seed beds. The house, she thought, was like that also.

But the man who sat on the box wasn't Abe; he didn't appear to be Paul either. She didn't know the man and hadn't known the dead one. For a time she felt herself conscious in the living person on the box in the chicken house, her mind heavy and numb, quick to the dead man under the floor.

And she wanted to look, to make sure the man under the floor was dead.

Suddenly a brindle cat, sleek as her mother's cats, walked in through the door. To hunt rats, perhaps. Big, live rats the cat could tear her claws into—and stick her bloody jowls against, eating alive. And Helen drew back.

But the big she-cat ignored the man, ignored Helen, and crawled into the opening the shifted board had made under the floor. The cat was under the house! Helen couldn't see her. The head would appear, feet and claws, body crawling back up to light, a piece of dead flesh in its mouth. Why was the cat staying so long? Down there underneath filling its belly and bowels with that yet warm though dead matter. Helen kept watching for the cat's head to come up . . . the man on the box, his eyes turned toward the hole in the floor, waited also. But the board didn't move and no sound came. The cat would be under there eating the man's head; Helen saw it in the live man's eyes as he sat stunned against the wall.

And then, Helen got up and went over to the board. With her foot, she pushed the slanted opening wider. It was big enough now she could put her own head through to look under, and she stooped closer. She could see the underpinnings of the floor—and she saw the dead body stretched at the far edge of piled chicken debris. *He stretched, his torn clothes as though added on to the pile, and seemed partly covered by dust from it. He was all dirty. The face and features sifted over with loose silt.* And his head lifted itself up slightly out of the thick dung as though alive. The head lifted, trying to raise itself.

About his head, about the open mouth trying to be closed, and about the face was the lithe she-cat, a house creature, all whole, purring and warming and rubbing. The way cats do for love, she thought, as the cat's fine little nose and whiskers moved close to the man's back and the furred feet with claws sheathed kneaded against his shoulder. The cat moved under the thick floor beams, over him from one side to the other, as though receiving something from him.

Loving him, Helen said, and she woke in terror and crying.

For awhile, impressions of the dream made no sense to her. Men do not fight or as uninhibited beasts kill one another anymore, she thought—but how we hurt, she said to herself. She pushed the cover back, as though to get out from the weight of the dream, and she saw Paul.

What did Paul want? she wondered. What was it he wanted for himself that had no part with what she wanted, or Abe or what Paul's father had wanted; or anyone else—? And a suspicion came into her mind that Paul had been the man under the floor.

He had gotten up to help Abe and it had cost him the night; cost her also, but that didn't matter. And who did ever—when did she look at Paul? Look at him apart from herself, from her wants, emotions. When did anyone look at another? And even now, it was a long time before she felt any impulse to touch him. (Watching him, as away from her separate and apart, so near on the bed.) Until on the edge of morning, as Myrtle Hughes her neighbor had said, she heard the wolves again chattering. Their woeful cries no longer so noisy, a little gayer . . . a little brighter because of the near light—. And she wondered if Paul though asleep could hear them. Lying on his side, facing the window openings, hearing the wolves as she heard them. If both so close to one another, close in space, heard the wolves. The sound seemed to come nearer. Had they left their stance beside the pond where the dead burned tree was, and scattered running? At another time, the wolves had killed a spaniel just out of the clearing . . . killed it on the drain-creek bank, pulled the dog's body into the ditch, but nobody heard or knew when the wolves had done it.

And she thought of Abe and Bett that winter morning without butane, helpless in the hard snow. No one had come from any of the houses, from Allie Vaughn's with the large barn and lot near the cut-off, to see about them. No cars passed. Not even the rural mail carrier made his route that day, and the low cuts and draws filled too deep for the few wagons left in use. All the people were cold and all stayed in their houses. What if she and Paul hadn't been there? Old Abe up without a fire, calling at the door of their house—. He had been outside to see about the chickens and had gone back to bed, and it was near nine. Though it seemed earlier; the air stayed bleared and dark with the continuing snow gale.

("Can you make some coffee—" he said. So cold, his voice stayed low. "The water's froze and I can't get a fire going in the house."

Paul got up, stacked the heater with quick-burning sticks. And Helen put on a long wool coat over her gown . . . late, but all had slept. "There isn't much good wood," Paul said—the snow had blown down suddenly and the supply was low. "When we go in, I'll move the stove and build a good fire in the fireplace."

"I couldn't get the top of the flue off," Abe said.)

An upper chimney vent, made to suction the draw and keep rain out, was caked solid with ice and the old man had been working to knock the clamp loose. "Maybe we can prize it together," Paul said, but the old man looked so cold—. "We'll get it off, if I have to climb up there to do it." And with the big heater going and coffee, leaving the old man warm, Helen went with Paul to see about Bett. Her mother was still in bed, but soon Helen heard Abe in the yard out near the chimney.

"Those won't work, they won't do any good," Paul had gone up on the roof. He kept yelling down because the old man was coming from the barn, carrying a load of long-cane fishing poles. "I need a long stick—the hoe won't do it . . . we'll have to wire some tree limbs to-

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gether!" and he came tromping down the ladder that reached only to the roof edge, short by ten feet to the top of the chimney. "For god's sake Helen, stay in the house!"

"It's as cold in there—" Helen said, and Abe wouldn't come in; but she went back to please them, her father winding with wire, still trying to lengthen the fishing poles. Paul nailed higher boards and a cross-strip on the ladder, but even then it didn't reach high enough for him to use his full force against the vent.

"What're they doing?" Bett kept calling from the bedroom; she was almost crying.

"We're trying to start a fire, Mama. But they can't do it till they push the top of the flue off—." (Freezing inside as out. And after awhile the old man came, his arms full of wet sticks. We have to make some sort of fire, Helen thought, before he catches pneumonia. Paul was again above on the house edge and noises came down from the chimney. She tried to look to the top from inside at the gouged metal trap with a little roof built over it, shed for the water pour.) Clogged, stuffed with ice settled into straw and stubble from abandoned sparrow nests. "He still can't reach that high, can he?" she asked.

Abe bent beside her and looked at the chimney. He hurried outside again and came back with the fishing poles tied together . . . swaying the twenty-foot canes through the wide open door, ends sticking up as he tried to force them past the black fire hearth. "I can't reach that far from in here either," he said, as the poles gave and bent, decayed soot from years falling in their faces. (Helen squatted under the soot, saw that the cane-ends had lodged on a disjointed brick.) Abe shifted the jointed canes and both pushed hard; they could hear Paul hitting with something heavy on the outer side.

"We're shoving it up!" Abe yelled, and fresh air swirled down on them with its weight of darkened soot. Though when the soggy fire was started, it was no better; the intermittent flame fumed with paper and wet limbs and the wind kept blowing smoke and snow down into the room. There was nothing to get a blaze going strong enough with to force the chimney suction to pull upward. "Dad—shut the door," Bett called. Abe had stuck his head in and left her bedroom open, but now he went on working with the fire. "You're letting smoke in."

"We smoked her out," Helen laughed, as her mother came coughing into the room with them; but she only looked about and went back, closing her door. Paul had taken the axe and gone up the road to cut a load of wood, from a grove across with a few fallen-over trees. She watched him walking in the thick settled snow and when he did return at last with the first cuts, tearing the paper and partly burned mess from the fireplace, they had to wait again. With his knife Paul whittled little shavings of kindling, so that it seemed colder with no fire. How tediously and with care his big cold hands worked with the small pine splinters, stacking them to retain air, but when finally a brief flame did catch in the dampness, the harder wood burned pure. And she thought of the tiny pieces open and criss-cross, his putting each in place carefully as match sticks, as he took off his frozen gloves and stooped with his head low to blow the little flickering fire.

After, when Paul went out again, taking his axe and sliding in the deep caking snow to tramp to a vacant house area, chop blocks from a fallen chinaberry, Abe couldn't warm the room up fast enough. He brought in Bett's sack of trash paper and cans from the kitchen, dumped and poked the sticky debris with old newspapers between the fire logs. As the softer material burned it made a fast heat before each wad choked itself and went out, but the ash accumulated, smothering the larger pure wood.

Helen remembered them sitting that morning—her father and mother, both old and cold, haunched in their chairs before the fuming hearth. Burning what they could find . . . trying to stay warm. Helpless as children, their lives dull and the simplest actions hard to perform as all human life became when persons were old. Would this winter be like the last one, hard and the earth in duress up until March? So that a life had to make its own breath, find its narrow boundary like going down to the root.

They were units in this unsettled place . . . together by hazard wild as the field grass and none of it would ever

bear fruit, the strain of connection not rich as the fig tree Paul planted or even strong as the pliable persimmon, but durable for a continual winter of punishment in an exterior cold. Even her parents were not native here, not being like those who lived about them who never left and had stayed all their lives with their own people—so that the whole structure was different; and that was as it should be (meaning not changeable, she thought). We'll be here, she said. Maybe not every winter but this winter we'll be here—and the next? That lay a protection that days only could tell.

She moved her hand over to touch Paul; he turned away to keep his sleep. (She knew her eyes were wet as they had been in the dream; and she felt a hurt as she had felt in the dream, as she rolled against him, took his big arms—crossed over, and unfolded them.) Softly as the cat had done, she pushed herself to hold him and be held and lay there not moving between his arms. And it pleased her in some way that the man slept with such tiredness and so profoundly he did not waken. (Whatever they did, wherever they went at some other time . . . "I'm here—" she said. And she waited, but not to stir him.) □

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CAROLYN McKEE

LEUKEMIA

Loose blood rose
to the skin,
his spleen swelled
like a child's
balloon.
His bones bruised
her, the blue
moons of his
fingertips
undid the braid
coiled like shells
at the back
of her head, she
tasted blood
in his mouth,
as she slept
and dreamed of
negligees
that glowed.
As if summer
holidays
approached
they bought books,
a camera.
Every Saturday
for ten months
when little
changed but
fruits in the
market, they
tunnelled the
avenue of
palms and drugged
eucalyptus
to the Center
where, survivor
of atomic
explosions,
transparent
skin radiating
death, he strode
in huge shoes

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and talked Kripke
semantics
or made bad
jokes (death
tapped him
not on the
shoulder
but the spine)
while in the
other room
his cells were
counted, while
she stared
at the floor and
wondered, where
is his father?
Finally the
bad count rose
and he moved
to the Center
to feed on
toxins, to
bruise the cells,
break the
strings of
D N A
whipping
deadly kites
high into
the blood.
From the
light-headed
corridors
outside his room
she watched
his arm turn
blue as
strangers'
blood
entered
through the eye
of a needle.
L e u k e m i a
L e u k e m i a
thick white cream
soured
in the bones.

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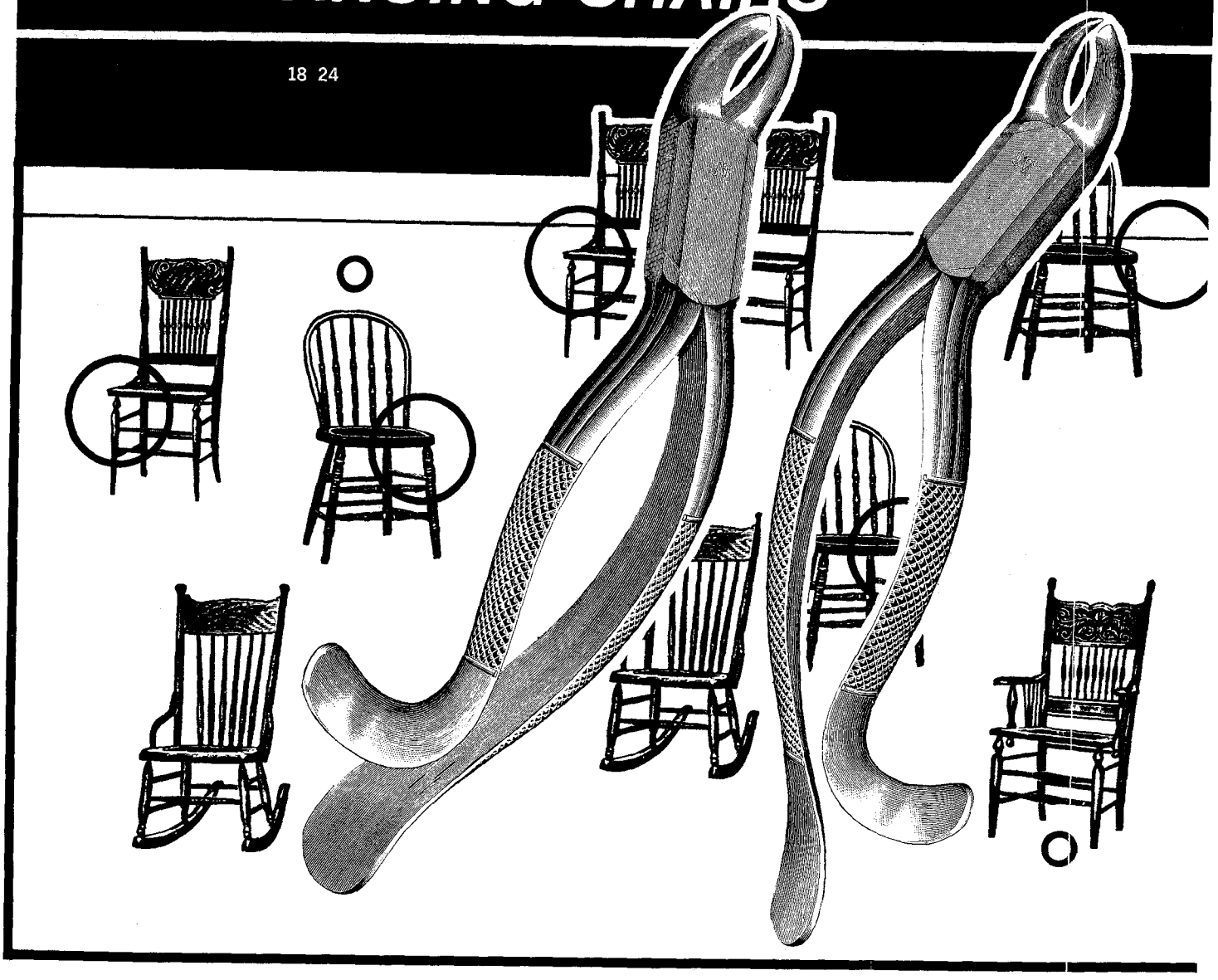
THE DANCING CHAIRS



November 8

Tonight an old pattern. On the way home from work I was inexplicably nervous, fidgeting the whole time and looking at my shoes. I was like a young girl practicing for her first piano recital, nervous at the very thought of it, and trembling even before there were people in the room. There was no one else on the street. And then I remembered. That old goose Rimsky is home tonight. How could I have forgotten? Of course that would explain everything and when I got home I naturally found him staring through the peephole at the chairs. After all these months he still can't believe it. And now that there is going to be a performance he is always poking around. Well no wonder. I am going to have to get some pieces of cotton to wad in the peephole in the door.

November 10

Damn Armond anyway! He's always causing trouble. This morning he accused me of coming into the office drunk, though he knows I don't drink. And this afternoon, in front of every secretary in the office, he called me an entrepreneur, whatever that means, for charging admission to the performance.

"Then keep your feasty eyes off," I told him.

"I wouldn't go to that performance if you paid me," Armond said to Marianne. And then he started up with me again, saying that my room was smaller than a closet, implying that I was a liar. A liar!

I asked him to please keep quiet.

"Chairs move when we move them," he said, "and that's all there is to it. If Bigshot thinks otherwise then let him bring some chairs here to prove it. And then, if it is

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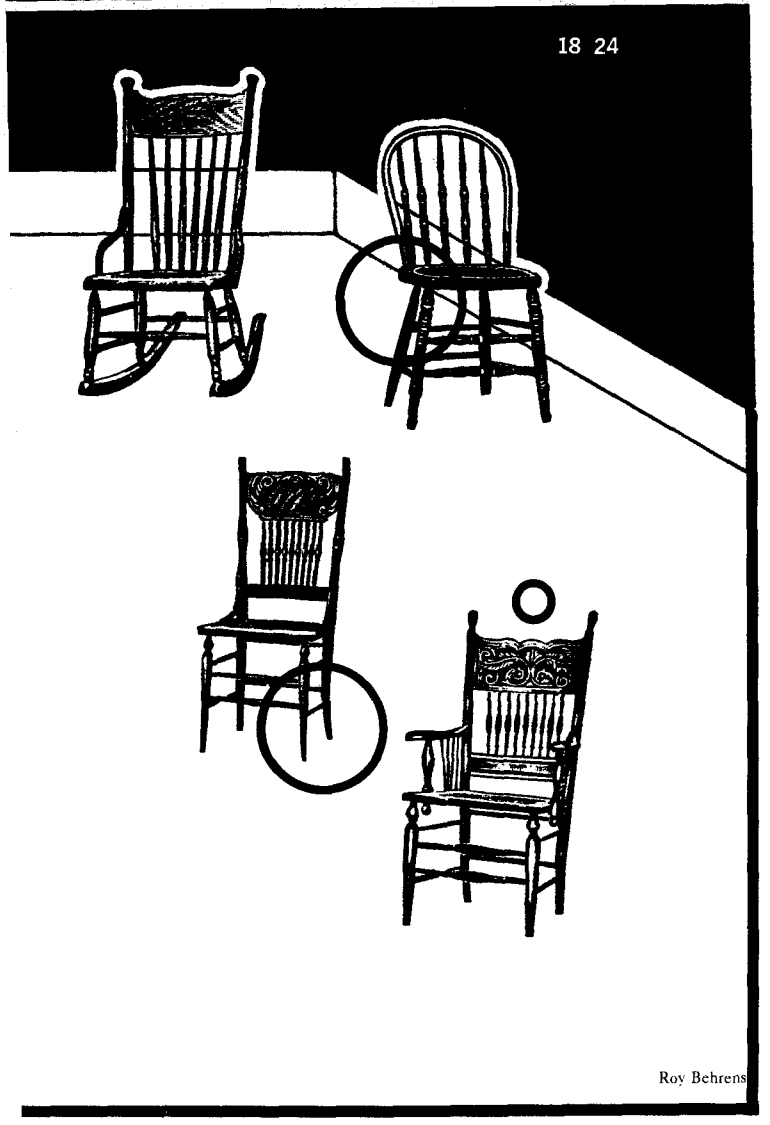
Edward Hirsch



true, I'll apologize to the chair I'm sitting on. I'll eat the splinters out of its wooden ass!"

I wouldn't sell him a ticket if he begged me! I mean it. I only wish he'd leave me alone. I'm tired of the petty squabbles, gossip he spreads about me in the office. I'm always on my guard against him. Yesterday he told Edmonds that I took an extra fifteen minutes for lunch, today that I'm an alcoholic. I've never taken a drink in my life! yet I felt guilty in front of him. All last month he was jealous because Edmonds put me in charge of the dye cuts on the Waterton account. I wonder if Marianne told him that I made eleven dollars more than he did last month. Eleven dollars! He has good reason to be jealous. Think of it; it was enough to buy a tea kettle, to replace the three dishes that had cracked trying to jump over the stove, to install another lock on the front door. I wanted to buy another pair of long underwear and a new pair of socks, but instead I bought a darning needle and some white thread. I can use rags for patches. Even with a performance coming up I can't afford to waste my money.

I wonder if I'll get a Christmas bonus this season. I'm afraid to ask Marianne to ask Schwartz or Bentley to ask Mr. McKinley about it. Of course last year I didn't say anything and I still got ten dollars, the year before that I got five dollars, the year before that I didn't get anything. I haven't bought a new hat in four years, a new sweater in six years, a new overcoat in nine years. I haven't bought a new bedquilt in thirteen years! The one I have now looks like shredded leaves, but it will probably be another thirteen years before I can buy another one. Money isn't as easy to come by as Armond's insults.

I wish I wasn't so afraid of him.

If only I had kept the Waterton account!

November 14

Sometimes I still don't believe it. I sit on a couch in the dark and simply cannot believe my eyes. Can you really trust what you see? Rimsky tells me that these things are common in Russia, and that once a bridge in Leningrad got up and moved itself two miles down the Neva. Apparently the city architects had made a mistake. I suppose that anything is possible, even a walking bridge. But now my chairs are forming a circle in the center of the room. They dance like mad women.

November 20

I'll never get the Waterton account back! Yesterday morning Armond removed a rush order for fifteen hundred special job lot #3 dye cuts that Marianne claims to have put on my desk. I'm sure he did it, sure there is something going on between them. It was my second chance at the account, but I lost it even before I knew I had it. Damn Armond anyway! How could I have known about a stolen account? This afternoon Mr. Waterton called up Mr. McKinley screaming that his business was going under, everything was ruined, if he didn't have his boxes that afternoon he'd take his business elsewhere, from now on he wanted Mr. McKinley himself working on the account. He refused to deal with anyone else, even on the small orders like dye cuts, even with Schwartz or Bentley. So now I've permanently lost my commission and may lose my job. What would the chairs and I do then? We'd be left out in the street, stripped down and abandoned like cars.

"He's not cut out for business," I heard Armond telling Marianne after Edmonds had threatened to fire me. "He

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EDWARD HIRSCH makes his second appearance in the NAR. He is presently writing in England.

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ought to stay home and babysit. All he cares about are his damned chairs."

I *do* care about my chairs. They're all I have. I miss them when I'm away at work. I hate the office furniture; straight-backed metallic chairs glaring under plastic lights, slimey green file cabinets, hideous water coolers! Lately I've found myself thinking about my own chairs during the day, wishing I was home watching them in the dark, listening to Rimsky's husky breathing on the other side of the door. Lately I've dreamt about them at night.

I must pay attention to my job! It's the only job I've ever held. In fact, Armond has been telling everyone that I'm the oldest one in the office; eleven years older than Marianne, sixteen years older than Edmonds, nineteen years older than Schwartz, twenty-seven years older than Mr. McKinley himself. And now Armond is jeopardizing everything! I wish I could ignore him. I wish Edmonds liked me more, I know he doesn't like me. If only he would speak to Mr. McKinley for me; if only I could speak to Mr. McKinley myself, I wouldn't even ask him for a raise. I'd only talk to him for a minute. "Mr. McKinley," I'd say, "I deserve a bonus." I *do* deserve a bonus! I wish I never had to go back to the office again. If only I could speak up for myself!

Damn Armond anyway. But I'll get my revenge later. I've decided that during the performance I won't even let him stand outside the door. Let him wait across the street and suffer. I say, let the bastard drool. Let him go home to Marianne's children. Let him find someone else with dancing chairs.

November 25

The word has spread quickly. You know the way rumors fly, and people have been approaching me on the street for tickets. Edmonds has warmed up considerably and I promised him five free tickets for his family.

"Can they really dance?" he asked me. "How do they do it?"

It was the first thing he'd ever said to me that didn't have anything to do with boxes, but I only looked at my shoes and refused to answer. Maybe after everything has quieted down he'll put me back on the Waterton account. This concert is the best thing that has ever happened to me! Of course Armond hasn't changed, but who needs him? I wonder if Schwartz will come; I wonder if Mr. Bentley knows who I am?

This afternoon Marianne told me that last night she tried to call me three times for two more tickets for her aunt and uncle, but the line was always busy. Of course it was. Lately the chairs have been more nervous than ever, as tense and highstrung as young actresses before a first audition. The ringing phone seems to annoy them so much that I finally disconnected it. I've also sealed all the windows with plastic because the noise from the street ruins their concentration. For about a week now they've been practicing all day while I'm gone, showing me their new steps when I get home from work in the evening. Frankly I think they like the idea of a performance, though I have to keep complimenting them to keep up their confidence. Their timidity hurts me.

The nicest thing of all is that the pressure of a performance has actually made the furniture closer; in fact, the room has begun to work together with a harmony I never thought possible. Tonight even the couch began rocking its hind legs and the bed started tapping its four feet. The dresser opened its five drawers and after a while even the mattress began swivelling its wavy hips. It was very gratifying. After all these years my room is finally beginning to realize that dancing is a family affair.

December 1

There have been odd things happening all day. This morning, for no apparent reason, I got a horrible cramp in my leg and walked around for hours with a charley horse. And then at lunch time I tripped over a curb and fell flat on my face. I had never done that before and there was something unnatural in my fall. I twisted my ankle and afterwards had difficulty pulling myself up, putting weight on it. Later I called Edmonds and said that I had a headache and a fever. I had never taken a sick day before and he told me not to worry, to go home to bed and take the rest of the day off.

"Be sure to take care of yourself," he said. "Only four more weeks to the wooden ballet. My children can't wait. I may even have relatives coming in from out of town."

Only one more month! That was precisely the reason I was afraid to tell him I had turned my ankle and wrenched my left elbow out of place. Perhaps he would think I was making an excuse for the chairs, looking for a reason to cancel the performance. But thirty days is a long time; sore ankle or not, my chairs will dance. They have to dance! At any rate, I had to have my ankle wrapped and my arm put in a sling, and spent the next three hours waiting around the hospital. The doctor told me I had a calcium deposit on my elbow and was probably developing arthritis. But there was something still not accounted for, and sure enough when I got home I found that the rocking chair had accidentally loosened one of its legs and that the dresser had fallen over on its side.

December 5

My ankle is much better, and I've decided to hold the performance on New Year's night rather than New Year's Eve so that everyone can come. I want them to come!

"But what happens if your furniture won't dance?" Rimsky asked me today. "What if the chairs are too shy?"

"What happens if you wake up tomorrow and find out that your apartment belongs to someone else," I told him. "You move out. But your apartment doesn't belong to someone else, it still belongs to you, so you stay."

"But what does that have to do with the furniture?"

"Look, birds stay in their branches and sing, right? It's their branches. But even when their trees are cut down, even when there are too many people crowding around them, even when they're trapped in sewers and outroared by traffic, they sing. Even though they know that singing is unreasonable, they can't help themselves. Well it's the same with my furniture. Birds sing. Dancing chairs dance."

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December 8

No matter how hard I try I can't get rid of the cockroaches in my apartment. They refuse to be destroyed. I can spray them at night until the air turns blue in my face, the floor is littered with drowning bodies, there isn't a live bug left in the entire house, but by the next morning they surge over the floor again like soldiers on a battlefield. They surface like tiny ebony gods; dropping from the ceiling, crawling out of the plaster walls, materializing out of thin air like beads of rain. They are more insufferable than Job.

I hate it when I find them crawling on the chairs. I can feel them on my legs at night, floating across my chest. Once when I got home from work I pulled the quilt off the bed and discovered a layer of bugs thicker than down. I screamed. And all night I sat on the floor trembling, too frightened to sleep. My chairs, haunted by the thought of paralysis, were too frightened even to move. All night they stared at me with the insomnia of blank walls.

Now I turn the mattress on its side when I leave the house in the morning. When I come home at night I turn the light on and close my eyes, waiting for the bugs to scatter. Then I turn the light back off, and sink into the sofa exhausted. Even with the memory of bugs, even with cockroaches sparkling in the walls like diamonds, my chairs prefer the darkness.

December 10

Too excited to write much. A five dollar pay raise! This morning Mr. Schwartz told me that he's coming to the performance and this afternoon Mr. Bentley came by my desk to tell me that he's asked Edmonds to put me in charge of the dye cuts on the Lessing account. The Lessing account is the largest account in the company! I was so excited that I forgot to thank him. Later when Armond heard Edmonds's secretary, Sheila, telling Marianne about it, he fell back in his chair as if he had been hit across the forehead with a sledgehammer, moaning like a wounded squirrel. For the past three years he's been in charge of the Lessing account. But now I've pried it away from him!

About an hour later he walked past my desk seething, and muttered something about breaking every bone in my room's body, but I only crossed my ankles and tried not to look at him. All afternoon I managed to control myself, but oh when I got home the chairs were jubilant. The pots and pans glistened. The lamps flickered, gloating.

December 12

Maybe with the money I make from the performance, plus my salary increase, plus the commission on the Lessing dye cuts, I could afford a nice quiet unfurnished apartment on a well-lit side street in the suburbs. The chairs and I need more privacy. We'd love to move out of this building, away from the neighborhood, away from our nosey, drunken neighbors. Of course wherever we move there will have to be plenty of floor space for dancing and enough room for the sofa to stretch its arms. There will have to be a large, clean kitchen with tile on the floor and wallpaper on the walls. There will be a bathroom without cockroaches! Maybe I could even afford a small one-bedroom house with a backyard and a patio, with green lawn chairs and a vegetable garden surrounded by flowers. There will be a picket fence to enclose us, and a barbecue that will not only cook, but will also learn how to call for a square dance. And then we'll make as much noise as we like. We won't let anything in the world disturb us. We'll dance till midnight whenever we want.

December 15

I've decided to rent a restaurant for the concert! Yesterday I realized that I've sold far too many tickets; I could never squeeze all of the people into my room. And today it occurred to me that I can't possibly expect Schwartz or Bentley to come to my apartment. How could I ask Edmonds to drive (or even to walk!) through this neighborhood? And what if the cockroaches surfaced in the washroom? Or worse, what if they appeared during the performance? I'd die of embarrassment. No, it's better to rent a place where the chairs can dance in pride. This is *their* night, and I won't let anything, or anyone, ruin it.

December 16

Every day Armond asks me about the state of my apartment; if I've gotten rid of the bugs, thrown out the carpet, replastered the walls? I can't take it any longer, and this afternoon when he started up with me again I blurted out that I'm renting a hall for the performance. He looked at me as if I'd told him that the earth was flat, or that his wife was pregnant again. Even Marianne had to smile. When Schwartz heard about it he slapped me on the back like a prizefighter. Bentley told me to keep up the good work. Edmonds gave me tomorrow off to look for the right place.

December 18

Renting a restaurant is more expensive than I'd ever imagined. I've spent the last two days going from place to place and the cheapest room that I can find is forty-five dollars. Forty-five dollars, and that doesn't include food! Even Rimsky, who knows even less than I do about concerts (even I know that), says that I can't have a performance in a restaurant without serving anything. For fifty cents per person I can have coffee and cake. I figure that if I have seventy-five people at two dollars a ticket I'll bring in one hundred and fifty dollars. My costs (room, food, free tickets), are between one hundred and ten and one hundred and twenty-five dollars (what large figures I'm dealing with!). Which leaves me less than forty dollars profit. That's hardly enough to buy a room full of new furniture, let alone to rent a new apartment. I've been depressed about it all day, calculating costs. How much I wanted to move out of the city! And yet it is more free money than I've ever had in my life. . .

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But oh when I got into the office this afternoon everyone was talking about it. Their enthusiasm was contagious. Less than two more weeks. Two weeks! I can hardly contain myself. I'm telling you that everyone in the office was talking about it. Can you imagine my chairs, adorned in bright colors and surrounded by other furniture, dancing in a restaurant? The idea is astonishing. Even Armond had to concede that it was miraculous, and offered me five dollars for a ticket. I told him to go dunk his head in a bucket of cold water. Edmonds told me that tomorrow Armond will offer me seven-fifty, the day after that ten dollars. He's that desperate. Well I say let him crawl. No matter how much I needed the money I still wouldn't sell him a ticket. "Same old Armond," I told Edmonds, "same bucket."

December 20

Last night Rimsky asked me if the chairs would dance in a foreign environment.

"They're so excited," I told him, "they'll not only dance, they'll probably fly."

December 21

I want the furniture to look its absolute best so I've promised everyone a new varnish. A new varnish! The desk was so excited that it started to tremble. It hasn't had a varnish in seven years. The old mattress seemed disgruntled so I promised him a new bedspread. Hang the costs! How often do we give a performance? I was so excited that I invited Rimsky in. He brought a bottle of whiskey and we both got roaring drunk. Later we started slapping each other on the back and he got up and jitterbugged with the heater.

"Let everyone in the world go dancing tonight," I called. "Let everyone find a partner. Let every stick of clothing find a body to wear it. Let every wooden chair dance in the arms of a gorgeous lamp."

December 24

The restaurant is rented and all the tickets are sold out! For the past two nights Rimsky and I have been driving some of the furniture over to the dance hall in his '54 Buick. Mr. Vespers, who owns the restaurant, lets us use the room after he's closed up for the night. I want the chairs to practice on the floor. When Rimsky and I get there we carry the furniture inside, lock all the doors, and then turn out the lights. The wooden chairs are fine. The rocking chair is a darling, even with his cramped leg, but the old stuffed chair simply will not dance. He is more stubborn than ever. He simply stands in the center of the dance floor, staring at me with huge, hurt eyes, and refuses to budge. Damn him anyway! He's always been something of a prima donna, something of a nuisance. Once I would have been more indulgent, but he knows how much this concert means to me. He knows I don't have a choice. Rimsky, who's taken a shine to the furniture (and they seem to be comfortable around him!) has been defending him, but I swear I'll leave him home if I have to, no matter how much it hurts me. I simply won't put up with his nonsense.

I bought taps for all of the chairs today. I even got horseshoes for the dresser. You can imagine how well they fit, how much they shine, how clearly they resonate on the wooden floor. When the time comes I'm hoping he'll do his Viennese, but I will not coax him.

December 25

Spent all day practicing. (The restaurant was closed.) The chairs were so good even I was astonished, even the walls applauded.

December 27

I've decided to move all of the furniture to the dance hall. This *is* our first performance and I want everyone to feel comfortable, to get used to the place, to be relaxed. I'm so nervous I can hardly stand still; I could dance myself. Both Schwartz and Bentley have asked me for extra tickets (I'm sold out!) and Edmonds promised me that if I get him five more tickets he'll talk to Mr. McKinley about my raise. I didn't even ask him!

Armond offered me twenty dollars for a ticket today. And oh the chairs were jubilant when I refused him. Everything is going right. This performance is the best thing that has ever happened to us.

December 28

Every night I move a few more pieces of furniture to the restaurant. Everyone, except the old stuffed chair, seems willing to dance outside of the room, though they are as quiet as church mice on the street. Rimsky told me that he thought the couch was bashful. The couch, of all people! I guess I don't know my room as well as I'd thought. I returned the new seat cover.

December 29

While I was gone tonight Rimsky heard a clattering of pots and pans in the kitchen. And when I came in the front door my books began to ruffle their pages. Tomorrow I'm moving everything to the restaurant, even the pots and pans, even the books, even my silverware! There is a mover coming to transport the stove and the refrigerator, and a carpenter has already promised to remove the fireplace. (I gave him ten standing room only tickets.) Let Armond threaten us as much as he likes. This is one family that won't be broken up.

December 31

All night I have been sitting on the floor in my empty room, too nervous to move, too excited to think. I miss my chairs! The poor things have been forced to spend their entire evening in front of a room full of noisy people, celebrating New Year's! Can you imagine their nervous-

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ness and fear? All night they've been forced to listen to voices so loud and close, so overwhelming that it stirs the blood. How could anyone possibly sleep? Of course I insisted on hanging a curtain between them and the rest of the furniture, trying to give them some peace by separating them and the neighboring room, but still I know how much they're bothered by noise, disturbed by unruly, drunken strangers. I know how nervous they are in unfamiliar crowds! And how much they dislike company! I hope they know how important it is that they get their rest, no matter what's going on around them. Only one more night!

Still, it's important that they've had a chance to get used to the place, to dancing in a foreign environment. And they may as well get used to being around people; there will be a large crowd tomorrow night. Tomorrow night! I hope they realize how close the performance is. I hope they know how important it is that they get their rest.

There is no sense second guessing myself. Still I can't help wondering if I should have spent the night behind the curtain with them. I should never have left them alone! Well, it's too late now. Rimsky said yesterday that I'm so nervous I'd probably only make things worse. It's true. I must calm down! Still, I miss my chairs. This is the first time I've ever been separated from them. This is the first time I've ever slept in an empty apartment. You can imagine my loneliness. Even the fireplace is gone. Even the stove is missing. Even the silverware has abandoned me! Only the cockroaches, those terrible, prowling insects, still remain. Even now I can hear them stirring in the walls. How I despise them!

Luckily the restaurant will be closed all day tomorrow. The first thing in the morning I'm going to drive over there with Rimsky. And I'll spend the whole day with the chairs, calming them down, soothing their nerves. I think I'll leave the curtains and the shades closed all afternoon so that they can rest, even if they don't sleep. Who could possibly sleep? I should never have left them alone in a strange room at night! I wonder if they're all right. I know that if anything happens I can count on the couch and the old stuffed chair to protect them. And the refrigerator is as solid as an oak, as large and responsible as an overseer. I know I can trust them.

I'm going to the restaurant first thing in the morning. Maybe I'll wake Rimsky as soon as it's light. He's almost as nervous as I am. This whole thing has actually made me start to like the old bastard. And the chairs trust him. Maybe I'll wake him now. There are less than twenty-four hours left! I hope the chairs know how important it is that they get their rest.

January 1

I'm writing to keep myself calm. How garrulous I've gotten! And how highstrung! I'd swear I'm more nervous than the chairs are. After all these months, these years really, there are only three hours left. I can hardly believe it. Our first and last public performance! I feel like an astronaut before his first space flight. But now I'd better say what I have to without dawdling. Soon I'll have to dress and hurry over to the restaurant to prime the chairs for the concert.

I arrived at the restaurant early this morning. The chairs were as nervous as squirrels. You could almost feel the electricity. Everyone was on everyone else's nerves, fit to be tied, or spoiling for a good fight. It was some job calming them down. The couch was so nervous that he spent the morning humming like a radio, drumming his fingers on the table and tapping his feet. The rocking chair spent the morning restlessly rocking in the corner, squeaking and sweating grease at the axle. Only the lamp seemed recklessly unaffected. With his shade pulled down over his eyes like a huge yellow sombrero he spent the day dozing against the wall. Not even the couch's insane humming could rouse him. Not even the fact that the rocking chair stared daggers at him the whole time. How I envy his long siesta!

I had a quarrel with Vespers this afternoon. He started to put a huge silver mirror on the side wall of my room, God knows why, perhaps for the effect. I asked him not to.

"Look, it's my restaurant," he told me.

"No mirrors!" I shouted at him. "I won't have mirrors in my apartment! They'll paralyze the chairs!"

"All right, all right," he muttered, taking down the mirror and hurrying away. "Don't get hysterical about it."

I don't know what's the matter with me. It took Rimsky almost an hour to calm me down afterwards. I've been so highstrung I can hardly recognize myself. This was the first time I've ever shouted at anyone. And yet I was right: I won't have mirrors in my apartment. I simply won't have it! Let him take his mirrors somewhere else. Let him put them in the bathroom or the kitchen, in the back of the store or in the front of his car. Let them mind their own business. Let them reflect their own emptiness.

Still, I think my shouting disturbed the furniture. Later when I went back to sitting on the floor, everyone was quiet, watching. Their eyes unnerved me. It took hours to unwind. In some ways I've never felt so distant from the chairs before, so distant from myself! This afternoon, for the first time, I actually began to wonder whether or not they'd dance. . . .

They'll dance. Before I left this afternoon I had a long talk with them, apologizing for my nerves, asking them to forgive me. I promised them that this was the last time they'd ever have to perform for strangers. This was the last favor I'd ever ask of them. At first I think they were suspicious, but by the time I left I think (and hope) everything was straightened out.

On the way home from the restaurant I was feeling quite cheerful and bought a bright yellow bowtie for the rocking chair and a new plug for the lamp. I bought the orange seatcover for the couch again. He can decide whether or not he wants to wear it. And before I left I arranged to have a large basin of water put on the side of the room. Sometimes when the chairs are dancing at home the faucets begin to run in the sinks. The sound of the water splashing softly on metal is soothing and muted, like the sound of the ocean at the back of a conch. But who needs the ocean? Tonight, my chairs, we dance on dry ground. This is our high tide.

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January 5

Too much has happened. How could I ever explain it? How could I ever write calmly again! And yet I feel calm, a vast calm, almost an emptiness, as if I'd been shipwrecked on a dry island for hundreds of years. I have nothing left inside of me; no energy, no memories, no voices. I never want to walk again. I never even want to move. Certainly not to dance.

January 7

Slept all day.

January 8

Slept all day again.

January 9

Sometimes I wake up shouting,
"They dance, they dance!"
"Lie back down," the nurse says to me. "Go back to sleep."

January 11

So little has happened, and so much! Am I mad? I must make an effort to speak about it. The doctors say I must make an effort. I must, I must.

January 15

But where does the beginning begin? With the chairs, with the quarrels with Armond, with the performance? So: Herr Doctor, is the beginning always the end? It is. We must not say so.

Calmly now. Calmly and slowly. I must recite the facts until they break down like a child before an angry parent. Calmly now. Calmly and slowly. . .

January 18

. . .The crowd itself was remarkably lively. Everyone was there; Schwartz and Bentley, Edmonds and his whole family, Mr. McKinley and his wife (even now it makes me shudder), Marianne, Sheila, Mrs. Lilly (from upstairs) with her seventeen year old daughter Lily, Rimsky in a black tuxedo! Even Mr. Vespers had brought his family. They were sitting in the front row.

At first the crowd was quite noisy. The lights were on and as soon as everyone sat down the waiters started to serve coffee. I was too nervous to greet anyone, and remained behind the curtain with the chairs. Rimsky reported how everything was going and finally, when the waiters were almost done serving the coffee, I went out and asked everyone to please be quiet. A hush fell slowly over the room. Then I pulled the curtain.

The room was still. At first nothing happened. Nothing! The chairs were so nervous they were buzzing with static. Even the lamp was as tense as a string. A few people in the audience had brought candles and naturally the chairs refused to budge until they were put out. Rimsky went over and quenched the small flames. Then I dimmed the lights. For a moment everything was quiet, everyone was watching, and then they began to move. I could hardly believe it myself. In the beginning they were self-conscious, but Rimsky and I were on the sides, softly tapping our feet, and then the old stuffed chair started to rock (I knew I could count on him!) and it all began. Gradually the pace picked up. The water began to splash in its basin and then the chairs joined their usual circle, with the table doing his soft shoe in the middle, and the old couch and the refrigerator and even the stove on the outside clapping their hands. When the dresser began his Viennese with the lamp, everyone, even Mr. McKinley, began to shout with approval. The noise kept growing until we could hardly hear ourselves talk. By the time the rocking chair did a somersault off the table it was so deafening that Rimsky and I had to hold our ears.

And then—I can still hardly believe it—the chairs in the audience began to move. At first it was muffled—they were rocking slowly back and forth on their haunches, but then they began to move like waves. The tables bounced up and down and there were dishes breaking everywhere. Lamps rocked in the aisles. Silverware floated in the air like butterflies. Whole pots of coffee began to rise toward the ceiling like helium balloons. The waiters couldn't even hold onto their trays. And then the lightbulbs began to crack against the fixtures, and the windows wobbled, and the crowd started to stir. They were frightened, and screaming. I tried to quiet them down. The performance was clearly over. People were standing in the aisles so that their chairs could move. Glasses of water were floating wildly in the air. And that was when I saw Armond.

He was standing in the back of the room smiling. He was surrounded by a group of teenagers, maybe five or six, carrying axes and knives and icepicks. I don't know how they got in. I would have ignored them, but when one of them started to swing his axe, I screamed. There was a low wailing noise (I couldn't tell if it was from the furniture or the crowd) and suddenly they were breaking everything in sight, and making their way towards the front. I tried to stop them. The room was in hysteria. I felt someone reaching across my chest, a floating of arms. When Armond slashed the refrigerator in the side with his axe I passed out, grabbing my lungs. That was all I could remember.

January 22

When I wake up I do my exercises first thing in the morning. Later I go down to the first floor for walking lessons, but I like to practice first. They've taken off one leg, and I'm working hard not to lose the other. My body is still as raw as an open wound. My skin is like gauze. At first I didn't care what they did to me, but now I pray that they don't amputate again.

Rimsky visited the hospital today. But I turned away from him in disappointment. I don't want any company, don't have anything to say. Once he started to tell me

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about Armond but I asked him not to. What happens to him no longer matters to me. Enemies are for the living.

January 27

Rimsky came back today to tell me that he is trying to repair some of my furniture. He says that the apartment is as glum as can be. Even the things that he saved won't move. Several chairs, most of the pots and pans, the refrigerator. He said that the remnants of the table are inconsolable, and that the dresser falls apart almost as soon as he manages to fix it.

"What do you expect?" I asked him.

"A room is not a morgue," he replied.

February 2

Thank God they've decided not to amputate. And for reasons which I still don't understand. Still, the reasons don't matter. What matters is that I'm keeping my leg. And now the doctors say that they see no reason to keep me much longer. Soon I can go home.

So: today for the first time I wondered about my apartment. How can I keep it? Rimsky says that I can collect unemployment. Last week Schwartz called to tell me that the office is putting together a fund to buy me some new furniture. How strange it sounded! And yet how anxious I am to get home! Somehow I know I'll manage.

I can't wait to step out of the hospital and feel the wind, the breathing of the city, the stretching of open spaces.

February 10

Tonight I was finally released from the hospital. I can walk with only one crutch now, and I took a cab home by myself. Rimsky was waiting for me. My room was clean but quiet. How much I'd missed it. And how much it had changed. Now it was bright mahogany, solid oak. Still, Rimsky had worked hard to save some of the old pieces. Though he looked somewhat tattered, the old stuffed chair had made it through. The refrigerator, with a dent the size of an icepick in his side, was standing in the corner. And the old splint table was hanging together, leaning against the wall. I sat down. There was the same mattress, but a new boxspring. I had even gotten a new sofa. Finally Rimsky left me alone.

I sat on the couch for a long time. How much I remembered and wanted to forget! Slowly the room crumbled into darkness. Everything was still. I could feel the old longings stirring in my blood. Was I mad? And then I stood up. Everyone watched me to see what I would do. I moved to the center of the room and began to tap my wooden leg. I could hear Rimsky's husky breathing on the other side of the wall. I tapped harder. And then I began to tap my crutch on the floor. The refrigerator seemed to listen. The new chairs perked up their ears. The old heater started to smile, and they knew that I was dancing, dancing mad. The room began to move. □

ALBERTO RÍOS

RETURNING TO THE CAT

The most obscene places of all
are the undersides of bridges
sprayed with Y's and UU's
and a child's greatest
"I WAS HERE" and a child's
cruelest "Robert loves Raul."
Here I have passed for the fourth time
the cat whose careful movements
and sliced marble eyes follow me.
Because I am a man
I have known it is exactly a cat
without looking into its dirtsheet bed.
But today I stop, and come back;
its movements are as cautious as mine,
like an old puppet's
whose rotting strings
must be pulled up gently,
as it explains to me carefully
the secrets of the ground underneath,
its body and separate fur crowded
with stuffed maggots and living things
squirming with ideas like
a child's body in a church pew.
Patches, I think, is buried
under the thin peach tree
and Susie under my brother's window.
Weasel just never came home.
And my grandfather.
From then, the mudhole
at every step is frightening
as if the ground were coming up
and whistling doesn't help
so that I must come back
a fifth and a sixth day and more
to this halfblack world underneath
to alter my new knowledge,
because I can't live with it,
feeling better even
by being more frightened each time
as, like the cat might have,
the smell follows me home.

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PAT MONAGHAN

TWO POEMS

Mothers and Amazons

She was once an Amazon,
scandal of the homesteaders,
galloping through fireweed
on her Arab mare: unshod
unbridled females, both of them.

Her eyes were skittish. She loved the horses
and her daughters. Her husband
raised the sons and barn.

When she would tell of the worst winter,
when she shot the stallion, how it
saved her marriage, those huge eyes
would hold onto the table-edge,
broken and well-trained.

The Amazon is long since gone.
The horses whinny just behind
the log-house walls,
and there are just reflections
in the glint of jumping trophies
of a certain rifle-barrel.

Her daughters are all grown. The horses stamp,
shaking the dinner table
and teacups rattle back.

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Christmas at Vail: On Staying Indoors

I knew the town from nightmares,
recognized at once this white pavement:
do not tell me it is only snow.
Underneath the frost the streets are just as white,
immaculate as condominium walls,
clean and pure. In the bistros we dine
endlessly for recreation: steak and fish.
(No hunting is allowed.) We can eat fruit here
and not expect retaliation. (Not a single tree
died for these chalets; they are built of inconceivable
alloys of indigestible material.) There is no killing here.

Even when we walk outside, we stay indoors.
Automatic sentries guard us, blindly approve
each time we pass from LionsHead to The Village.
All the buildings are provided with glass eyes.
I have become convinced that huge machines
inside the mountains manufacture breezes
to slap our cheeks from white to red.

There is reason for the loudness of the wind.
It covers the gnawing of trapped rodents,
the steady drum of taproots seeking water.
Every wall in Vail is hollow. Inside
the ghosts of laborers clamor
like steam-pipes in the night.

Underneath a fireplace stacked with spruce logs
there is a hill of gifts. Nearby a newspaper
carols inaudibly of rape and of starvation.
We burn it after dinner. Its ashes
drift like blackbirds over Vail,
detonate on tame hills like grenades,
liberating the ground. The mountains,
rising up like fists, surround the town.

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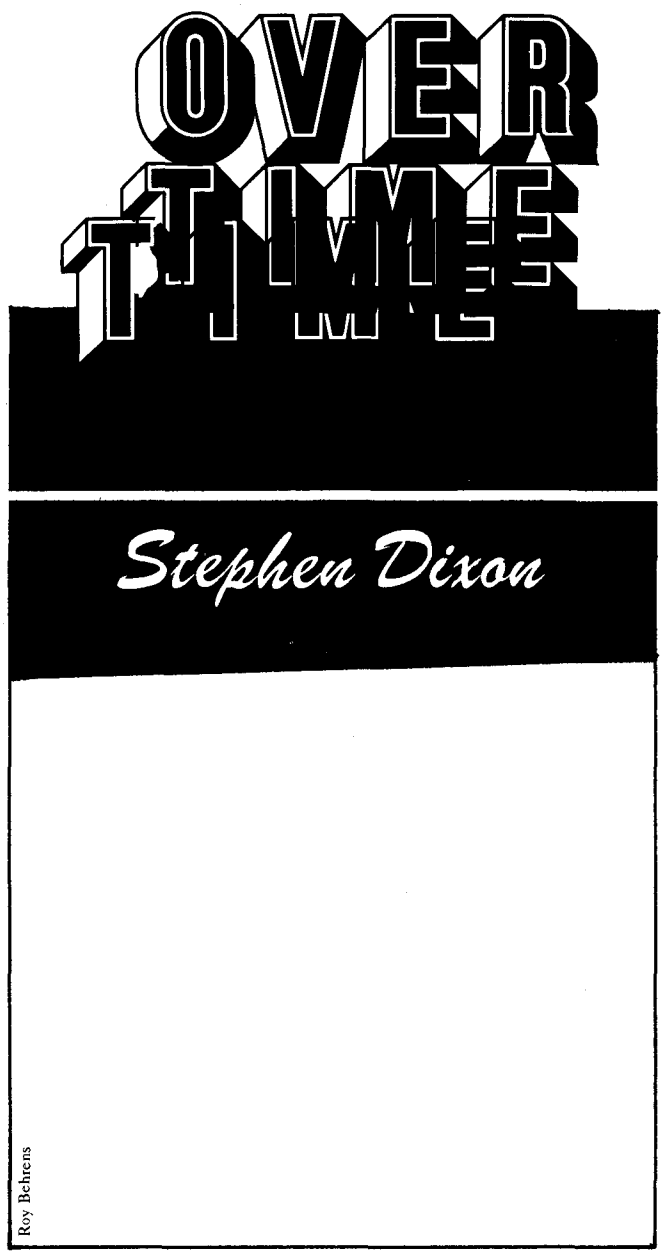
STEPHEN DIXON is the author of two novels, Work, *published by Street Fiction Press, and* Too Late, *published by Harper & Row.*



I do everything he told me to. Then there's nothing more to do. I check over what I did and it seems good as I can get it. I wait. I get up, sit down, look at the clock, walk around. Where is he? She? Where are they? How long do they expect me to sit, stand, look, walk around, wait for them like this with nothing to do? They say they're going to be back in an hour, why does it have to be four? If I could go to sleep or take a walk outside and step in for coffee, it wouldn't be too bad. But if one of them caught me sleeping or not here when they get back it would. They'd think I always slept or went out when they weren't here. Hell, I've waited long enough. I'm taking a walk and will live with the consequences if they find out.

Going down the stairs, I see them. "Where you been?"

"And where you going?" he says.

"I waited so long that I decided to take a walk. Waiting tired me out and I need some exercise like walking to undo that."

"Now you don't have to wait any longer and you'll get plenty of exercise working, so come on back up. We still got lots to do, which you could've started doing before us."

"Like what? I finished what you told me to do and checked it to make sure it was right. And you didn't leave instructions for anything else to do because you said you'd be back before I was through."

"You could've cleaned up the place."

"Cleaning's not what I was hired for. I left that sort of unskilled stuff for better pay and more demanding work like what you hired me to do."

"But that's how you could've spent your time. You should've thought of that. Anything can always be cleaned. Ten minutes after you clean something it can be cleaned. Soap can even be cleaned. And cleaning or anything like that would've been more productive than just getting bored and irritable waiting for us or going out for a walk."

"It might've been more productive for you but for my mind it would've been very unproductive. It would've been going backwards from something I worked myself up to be, which might've ended up with my being even less productive than before for you."

"Come on, you're wasting our time talking. Let's go to work."

"I'm still so restless from waiting that I've got to take a walk."

"Walking's not what I'm paying you for except when you're doing it for me. You want to keep your job, you come upstairs now and work."

I think it over and go upstairs. They've already started working and I pitch in. Later he tells me what else I should do. Later she does too, tells me, and I do it. At times we're working on the same thing together. Other times we're working on separate things or the same thing but in different parts of the room. Sometimes two of us are working on the same thing and one on another thing. Other times one of us is in the restroom or on the phone or making coffee for us all and two are working on the same

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thing or separate things in the same or different parts of the room, and so on. Then it's all done. I even worked an hour longer than I'm being paid for and there's more to come. We put what we worked on into boxes, wrap and address the boxes and bring them to the post office and ship them off.

"That didn't take too long," he says.

"Long enough."

"About as long as I expected it to," she says.

"But we did it much quicker than I thought or hoped we would is what I'm saying," he says.

"It might not have been quicker but would've been sooner if both of you had come back earlier."

"Anyway, we got it done and we'll see you tomorrow," she says.

"About tomorrow," I say to him. "If you're both not there or don't plan to be by the time I get to work, could you leave instructions for me if you're going back now or just give them to me or phone or send them in early tomorrow so I can get right to work rather than waiting for you?"

"If we're late and I haven't left instructions or sent or phoned them in or she hasn't phoned them to you for me, then just clean the floor a little, wash the windows. They're all dirty and the floor especially. Tidy up the place is what I'm suggesting, scrub down the restroom and all its parts. If we're really late and neither of us phone and I don't send in your instructions and you've cleaned the entire place to where it really shines, give a little paint job to the ceiling and walls. The paint, brushes and turpentine are in the closet. One coat. If we're really very late and no instructions were left or got to you in any of those other ways and the paint's dried, give it two coats, but no more than two."

"I don't see how I could do more than two coats in one workday. You said turpentine, so I guess the paint has an oil base. Oil paint takes a long time to dry. I don't even think I can put on a second coat in the time I'm scheduled to work tomorrow if you have me do all those cleaning things besides."

"So put in a couple hours extra."

"For money?"

"Do it because you like the job. Show me that. And that you want to keep it. Because you too often complain. Do you ever hear her complain?"

"I've complained," she says. "Plenty of times."

"About me you've complained. That I'm not nice enough to you after work. That I don't take you out often enough, show you enough attention and make pleasant enough talk and give you enough good things. About those you complain a lot, almost all the time, but I'm talking about at work."

"About work you're right. I have no complaints. Pay's good and hours aren't too long and work's not too hard."

"So if neither of us is here tomorrow when you get in and we don't phone or I don't leave instructions or send them to you, clean up the room, scrub everything down, don't just sweep the floor but mop and wax it. And the windows and every shelf—really get this place into top-notch shape. Two coats of paint. And if you later have nothing better to do, put in a few extra hours painting the doors and windows and all the furniture and shelves."

"I'll have to get overtime pay for that."

"I don't pay overtime."

"Then I can't give you any more free overtime. I did it today and almost every day for months when you promised me you wouldn't keep me beyond my normal workday, but no more."

"You only worked nine hours today."

"But I was here for 13 and a half—that half for lunch and 4 of those hours waiting for you."

"You rest at home, you rest here. No big difference and for all I know, the office might be nicer than your home, and even more so after you clean and paint it."

"But it isn't my home. No overtime pay, no more extra work."

"Then I'll have to let you go" and he asks for my keys to the office, I give them, she waves goodbye and they go towards the park and I head the other way. I turn around when they're a block away and about to enter the park and yell "You bastard." Neither of them turn around. People walking past do. They look at me and seem to wonder what I'm yelling about and to who.

"That bastard," I say to people who pass. "That one over there. The man. Well, he's gone into the park or got in a cab or run one way or the other along the street, for he's not where he was or anywhere near there when I yelled at him. But he is a bastard. A slavedriver. Wants me to work overtime almost every day but for nothing. I wouldn't. Why should I? Man's got to get paid for his work. That slavedriver. I hate him. Bastard," I yell towards the park. "Get another sucker to work any number of hours overtime for no pay, but not me again."

"These days you're lucky to have a job." a woman says. "He fired you?"

"Today. For not working overtime for free."

"I know. You said. Can you give me his name and phone? I might like to apply for the job now that it's open."

"I don't think you'd like it."

"Why? I like steady work and money. Right now I'm out of work and broke. Let me speak to him and decide."

I give her his name and phone number. She says, "This is the best hope for a job I've had in weeks. For if you just lost it then I'll probably be the first one to apply for it." She goes in a phonebooth.

"You calling him now? Because I'm sure he won't be there till tomorrow. I just left him."

"What do I have to lose? He's not in, I've lost a dime. Big deal—I can't be that broke."

"Nobody will be in, so you won't lose your dime."

"Good, then I'm losing nothing by calling him."

"Time. You'll be losing some time."

"What else do I have to lose now?"

"Also your common sense. I think you'll be losing some of that too, because I just said he definitely won't be in and yet you still want to call him. You'd think you'd take my advice because you'd think I'd know."

"You lost your job, so who are you to talk that you know anything? If you still had the job, then I'd say they're keeping you because you know something."

"No, that common sense loss gives you away. I don't

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think he'll hire you. Or maybe he will. Maybe you're just the person he needs."

"If you're saying all this to stop me from making the call or my applying for the job or even just to insult me, it didn't work."

She dials and I go home. By the next day I've thought about it a lot and call him and keep on calling him till I get him in around noon and say "Look, I apologize. And if you give me the job back and still want me to, I'll work a couple hours overtime for nothing today and with no complaints."

"I already hired someone you told about the job but who said she wasn't using you as a reference because you insulted her when she started to call me."

"All I told her was that she wasn't showing common sense in trying to call you minutes after you fired me when I knew you wouldn't be back at the office till today."

"Well I did go back a few minutes after I left you. I forgot something and she got me just when I was coming in the door. She said she heard why you got fired and that she's just the opposite of you and is willing to work overtime for no pay every day this week."

"But I know how to do the job. And I'm willing to work as many free hours overtime as she and all week if necessary also and the following week too. And me you won't have to teach how to do the job. Think of all the time you'll be saving—the jobholder's when it doesn't have to be learning what it already knows and yours when you don't have to teach."

"What time? A few minutes? Half hour at the most? For what's so complicated about your job? I'll miss a lunch, that's all, and what do I do at lunch anyway but sit around and eat and get fat and maybe sleep."

"You sonofabitch."

"You know, that's the second time you cursed me in less than a day. You called me a bastard yesterday. I didn't answer or turn around so I don't know if you knew I'd heard. I know it wasn't meant for your former co-worker as you've no reason for calling her one. And today a sonofabitch. How do you expect to be rehired cursing me like that?"

"You weren't going to rehire me."

"You don't know for sure and I won't tell you. I'll make you sweat, except to say I told her to call at one today to confirm if I still wanted her to come in at two."

"You're just trying to make me feel as if I really lost something in not working for you and I'm telling you that I didn't lose anything for there are always just as good jobs around and for you to go screw off."

"Three times in less than a day. Now I'll tell you what was in my mind before you cursed me the second time and still in my mind but only by a little before you told me to screw off. I was going to rehire you."

"Bull."

"Nothing you say will make it any worse or better for you. So if you only want to stay on to hear what was in my mind before, I'll tell you, and every word the truth, which I can afford to do with you now. I was going to rehire you if you agreed to working overtime for no pay whenever I needed it but which I wouldn't be so excessive at, if I have been. I thought I'd maybe been a little unfair to us both in so quickly firing you, because as workers went, you were okay and why should I expect anyone better or more reliable or less complaining in that kind of job for the pay it gets. If you agreed to my terms, then when she called at one I was going to tell her I rehired you but would keep her in mind in case you didn't work out again. Then, when you called just a few minutes before I was going to call you, I thought I'd let you shoot your mouth off and agree to all my terms without my even asking them, which would give me an advantage for asking more things out of you in the future. Now with your curses you're not going to get any work reference from me but the worst." He hangs up.

I start looking for work in the type of job I just had. All the interviewers ask for the name and phone number of my last boss. I give it. They call and later say he said such bad things about me that there's no chance they can give or recommend me for any sort of work. So I tell the next interviewers I see that I left my last job six months ago—though not because I got a better one, which was what I told the previous interviewers—but because I felt I could do much better and make more money and also wanted to take a vacation for six months after working steadily for 15 years before I looked for work again, and I give the name and phone number of the boss I had before the last one. Apparently what she says about me isn't as bad as what the boss who just fired me said, but still isn't good enough to get the job I think I'm qualified for. "Maybe several months ago," one of the interviewers says, "you would've gotten the job we have with the kind of weak work reference your last boss gave, but not with the way the slim job picture is today."

So I go even further back to the job before the one I left six months ago, where I know the boss thought I was a good enough worker for the one after him to give me a job. But because I've been out of work for almost two years and his reference or memory isn't that great, whatever he tells the interviewers isn't enough for me to get the job.

Finally I just tell the next interviewers that I haven't worked for seven years. When they ask why, I say I've been living off a series of women all that time or traveling around the world off my savings or an inheritance or have been on a drunk for more than six years, but I'm okay now, have decided that living off women is unethical and traveling for so long doesn't get you anywheres but broke and I haven't had a drink for almost a year now and am willing to work hard for little money in whatever kind of work they want to give me.

I land a really rotten job with about ten hours more work a week than the last one and for half the salary. My new boss wants me to work overtime for nothing and I say I will and don't complain about it and after a year of this work and more free overtime than I did in any job I had over the last 20 years, I get a small raise. But it still takes me a few more years before I'm making as much, for almost twice as many hours, as I did in the job I was last fired from. Of course the cost of living has gone way up since then, so in what I can buy for my wages I'm actually making a lot less than I did several years ago. But like the lady who replaced me then might still say, I feel lucky to have a job. □

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ARS LONGA, VITA BREVIS

(for my father)

1. B. O. Boffo, But . . .

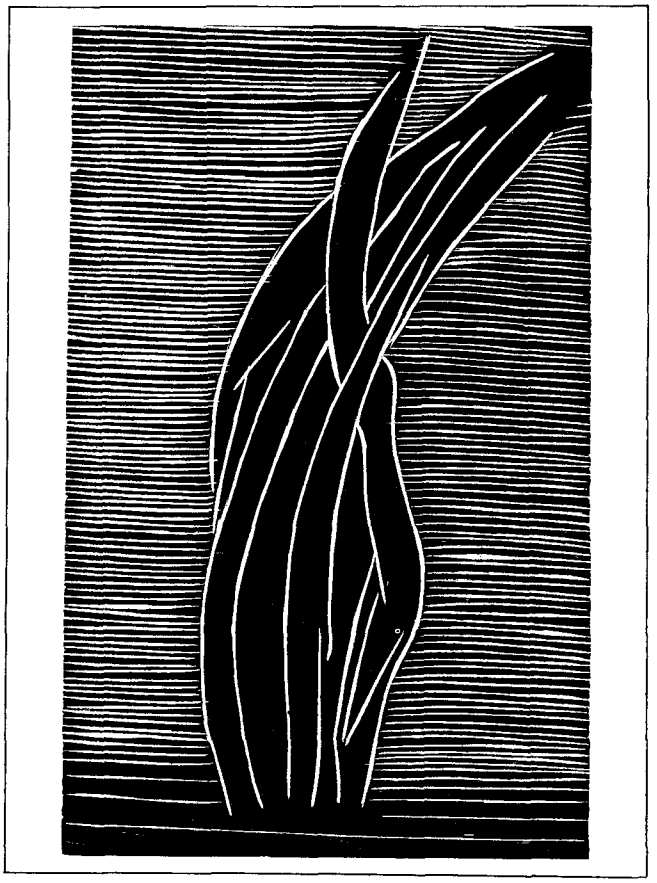
June, July, August, and always—that's the way box office business has been recently. July in 1978 was another monthly record, the 14th consecutive record month, the 17th out of 20—and it continues. Based on this track the complete domestic B.O. for 1978 might be projected at $2,750,000,000, a jump of 16% from record breaking last year (remembering that these are gross figures, that film rentals which go to the movie makers—studio, individuals, or various kinds of partners—are one-third of it).

The down side of this, of course, is ticket inflation which is nearly 5% over last year, but isn't that the cross the green hangs on these days? (We're not all hung on it?) And the irony is that:

> *"A lot of people . . . are wondering more and more why it is that . . . the Major American film companies are making fewer and fewer pictures? One answer is that, with the current economic realities of the business, they cannot extend production investments too much without repeating the mistakes of 10 years ago when over-production helped cause the disastrous Hollywood depression of 1969-71."*
>
> *–A. D. Murphy,* Variety

[In addition to which I might append, from memory, that the films made in those years seemed totally irrelevant to their times, and maybe the audience just chose not to come.] However, according to industry thinking, the facts of the matter are that the amount of money available for investment in product is limited realistically by a series of complex factors and mind boggling computations. Box office is the whole ball of wax only; out of it comes what distributors and exhibitors take (or steal), so what the producers get is film rentals. One-third of the total, and that's divided among all the motley groups that make the films. There's a big difference between 20th Century Fox and American International Pictures (although the latter—see below—is reaching for the more prestigious).

Also to be counted is the effect of the blockbuster hits on the general run of all films available at a particular time. A "Star Wars" or "Close Encounters" is seen by everybody, but that doesn't mean that everybody also goes to see the small serious movie down the block. In fact, in blockbuster time, the other pictures often aren't seen—and, unfortunately, die. Should the distributors want to pour more money into the pit of advertising and print costs (averaging a little over twice the cost of making the film) after a picture opens and nobody comes? In round figures, an estimate is that a film needs to bring in a little over twice its cost to break even.



And here again is old inflation getting in line—everything from film stock to apple boxes costing more, and more again. And the people involved, from gopher to star, are looking to stay ahead, too, so wages and fees and points, they don't go up, too?

If, round figures again, the overall rise in the years since 1971 is about 4½% a year, that's good, but it's not enough for anybody to put the hammer down. And the hope of a box office bonanza is higher with a couple of blockbusters (at 10 to 20 million each) in the can, than the risk of four to six smaller less broad-based special films. *Viz* "The Wiz" which cost 20 million, and is, I think, a mish-mash film, but who isn't going to see it? Just because of the freight it carries: a 70-year old classic book, an American folk myth, and the incomparable 1939 film. How much more could you ask?

The predilections of the fickle audience are apparently whimsical withal, thus the comforting security of something assumed to be *bankable*, a Paul Newman or another of the *big ten*, or being pre-sold like "The Wiz" (with the piquant child Judy Garland transmogrified into the sexy woman Diana Ross)! And estimation of the domestic gross is no longer the base on which a picture is made. Now it's what the picture will cost, the advertising and distribution, what the networks will pay for

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TV rights, cable, publishing and merchandising (including long-play and 45 rpm records!)—these are the nuts and bolts. Sam Arkoff, president of American International Pictures, says: "I'm not interested in being involved with a picture that has no network possibilities." When once AIP made nothing *but* pictures with no network possibilities.

It's possible now that networks sale, syndication, and the ancillary receipts from tie-ins and books and records can cover the negative costs for medium budget pictures (that's between four and seven million dollars). Two million is now considered low budget (I remember when it was 250 thousand), and some people say it doesn't exist. "FM" (Universal) cost 2 million to make, but that was barely 35% of the total the folks in the Black Tower spent to get an audience to walk into the theatres. And it sank, something like a stone. Prints now average $800 each, and you want to put the picture in 100 theatres—that's $80,000—and that's only the beginning.

Mike Medavoy of Orion Pictures (*née* United Artists) said he looks at a script, predicts price of TV sales, value of merchandising and music rights, and asks, "If I make this picture what's the most I can lose? If the figures are acceptable, make the picture; if not, pass."

2. Left to Right to the Ranch, Right to Left to the Indians

(3 Westerns)

Maybe all the conventions of the genre *Western* are best displayed in John Ford's "Stagecoach" (1939), which starred, as Ringo Kid, a young John Wayne. Certainly the mold existed before him, but after this picture a new one was cast in his shape. He's the archetype, a man wanted by the law for something he had no moral right not to do. A loner too, larger than life, alienated from the ordinary with a mixture of pride and shame. A rough and handsome exterior, prickly, but underneath kind to the pregnant ladies and stray cats—claiming (gun ready) to want to be left alone. As hero he wears a white hat and holds up his pants with both suspenders and a belt. He calls the whore, Ma'am; in the end they go off together in triumph, on the way to the small ranch he has.

Such a conglomerate of characters, representing elemental Western stock types, driven to this trip for various reasons, pure and not so, in that rolling metaphor that constrains them cheek to jowl—and being chased by Indians too! What makes all this not stock or trite or dumb is that it is the product of an original mold too; it is a classic film.

Times change and sensibilities adapt to see with new eyes; or they don't, creating the anachronism and the anachronist. "War Wagon" (directed by Burt Kennedy) was released in 1967 or 1968. In a review written at the time, Pauline Kael writes:

> *"The classic Western theme is the doomed hero–the man without a future because the way of life is changing, the frontier is vanishing, and the sheriff and the schoolteacher are representatives of progress and a new order."*

I saw "War Wagon" on television recently and (given the different gestalt of that medium and a theatre) it struck me as a thin, clever, seriocomic melodrama, the kind of film where guys shoot other guys and then jump on their horses and ride away. I mean, who takes care of the paper work, picks up all the bodies? (Maybe there's a story from that point of view?)

Its conventions: 1) John Wayne—playing his usual good-bad guy—photographed from the rear and a low angle, walking away (the man sure has a distinctive walk); 2) the real bad guys with nothing good about them, and they are basically the establishment, just trying to make an honest buck in the good old American way; 3) the first appearance of the War Wagon (a kind of armored stage fitted with a Gatling gun) in the obligatory wide shot, photographed under the big sky; 4) the obligatory Indian confrontation and their subsequent massacre with the Gatling gun; 5) all Mexican ladies buxom; 6) the obligatory barroom fight with broken bottles, mirrors and the destruction of the piano; 7) the antiheroes triumphing in the end, though usually somebody on their side dies.

What's happening is the bad guys are taking all this gold and the others are going to take it away. A dynamiter, a technician, is one of the robbers, and there's a good deal of footage showing the detail of his job. That's modern, and goes along with the war wagon which needs only an engine to be a tank or an armored car. The times they are a-changing out among the painted buttes and the saguaro—tanks and machine guns and dynamite and all that, but finally the picture really is camp, a kind of satire on the form, empty to the purist in me. Like all the way through, a macho Kirk Douglas has been vaulting onto his horse from the rear. The last time he does it he misses, but you don't catch me laughing.

"The old west was a dream landscape with simple masculine values," Pauline Kael wrote back then, "the code of the old Western heroes wouldn't have much to say to an audience today." I wonder about that; if it isn't that just the elements in the game have changed, and, of course, our view.

"The Shootist" (1976, directed by Don Siegel) I saw in the theatre when it was released, and then again recently on television. (Would you believe that with *promos* for the next night's shows the network obliterated the credits which come at the end!) I have been in Carson City too, that strange quiet rural capital of one of the least touched and empty and pioneer-swinging western states. There whorehouses advertise, gambling is a major industry, and there's no income tax.

The film was shot there, and seeing the streets as they are now it was only a small jump to see them in the film as they were at the turn of the century, 1901. That's when streetcars, running water, the telephone, paved streets had come, and the sewers and electricity were on the way. Into this new world rides, of course, an aging John Wayne playing perfectly J. B. Books, the aging gunfighter and loner. To have confirmed by his aging doctor friend (another old Western archetype himself) Jimmy Stewart, that the pain in his bowel is killing him, and it's cancer—the modern scourge.

The progress of the picture is what he does with his last weeks. There's a widow-woman, Bond Rogers, living with her just-about-to-be-grown-up son. She runs the boarding house and reluctantly puts Books up, then, in spite of herself, is attracted to him. Played by Lauren Bacall (to her credit not afraid to play and show her age), the two take a buggy ride toward the end. And it's a wonderful

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scene: arch, coy, flirtatious, filled with a fine sense of age and love, or illusion and reality. There is pointed contrast in the anachronism that Books is in the new world. There's also the barber saving up the hair he just cut, to sell—after—as souvenirs. And the undertaker, John Carradine (another classic Western type), who buys a deal for the funeral (with both knowing he'll clean up on the side-show around it). And the pushy journalist/writer who wants his collaboration on a book about his experiences (editorialized for spice and potential sales).

Against all this is Books, who has killed countless men, wearing his credo of alienation like armor. "I won't be wronged," he says, "nor laid a hand upon. I never killed a man who didn't deserve it." The classic Western hero—vigilante type—no longer useful, a character among characters who seem very real, against the historical point of view, the passing of an era is poignant in the dying—their fate.

In the manner of being useful, on his last day, his birthday, wearing his good suit and carrying all his guns, Books takes the trolley downtown, and in the obligatory bar shoot-out, he takes with him three who deserve it.

He is observed by the widow's son, who hero-worships him and what seems to have been a more romantic time, who covets the glamor of the gun, and who in the end rejects it—throws the gun away. A dying Books nods, the old doctor nods, the kid has become a man of the new west—for better and worse.

In 1978 "Comes a Horseman" (directed by Alan Pakula) is a Western without John Wayne. The present modish cloning of the old hero is in the shape of a Jimmy Caan, if anything more tight-lipped than his model. Also there's the lore-of-the-west mouthpiece the sidekick (Buck, played by Andy Devine in "Stagecoach" was that) who knows it was once more simple. This old partner-family retainer speaks in Western homilies. "Pushing cows out of these hills is like teaching an elephant to type." He might be of the generation of Mrs. Rogers' son, who threw away the gun (which didn't work). Now, when force is needed in 1945 (in 1978), the World War II veteran, who only wants to be left alone

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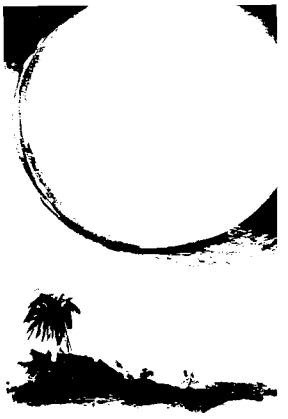

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A NOTE

The editors are pleased to announce that the story "Passion?", by Jonathan Baumbach, which appeared in the Spring 1978 NAR, will be included in the next *O. Henry Prize Stories* Collection, forthcoming from Doubleday.

ADDENDUM

The informal review of A. G. Winans' *North Beach Poems* (in the NAR's "Readers Recommend" department, Fall 1978) is a shorter version of a review by Hugh Fox which first appeared in the small press review magazine, *Northeast Rising Sun*. The editors apologize for omitting credit to Mr. Fox.

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to put his small ranch together with hard work, picks up the gun again.

A hot cameraman, Gordon Willis, shot the picture (a little self-consciously) and Jason Robards and Jane Fonda are in it, too, the latter turning in her usual down-to-earth excellent performance. As a feminist, vintage 1945, she's an independent and assertive woman, the classic Western *heroine* determined to survive being eaten by the big rancher (bad-guy) Robards, and, of course, in spite of fitful and violent spats with Caan, they each need the other, and come to love and bed with each other, and will, eventually, marry.

It's one of the familiar plots, up there on the list of the possible ten that form the body of Western (and maybe all) literature. There's nothing new under the sun, but putting on a suit of clothes disguises things a lot, and this suit is that the obligatory confrontation with the Indians has evolved into a confrontation with ecology. That's the developers, the oil men, the big-business interests who contribute to the land's exploitation. It's old paradox time again, our need for energy and the pollution of heaven and the rape of the earth to get it. Against these black hats are the poor and hard working, hero and heroine, saving their small combined independent spread, set in the verdant green valley. Much of the picture is him looking at her, and her looking at him, not saying much—but Jane Fonda has an expressive face.

It's a good modern elliptical story, episodic and ambiguous, and I like the film. If "Stagecoach" is a classic, and "The Shootist" a great film, then "Comes a Horseman" is on the top of the very good list. An action script that moves fast enough to cover the holes in the plot, at the end after the metaphoric conflagration has burned up the past, Jimmy and Jane are left in the sun, sleeves rolled up, rebuilding it again. It's a nice image, and a good message—perhaps—given the times.

3. Jaimi O'Neill

My second daughter, it seems she graduated yesterday from 8th grade, and now—18 months later—is suddenly a womanly presence in our house. Tall and pretty, often sedate (where yesterday she was mostly antic), it's adolescence and it's amazing and she wants to be an actress (and musical comedy singer and dancer)—*everything*! Already she's good, from behind her closed door I can hear her voice and feet, practicing. She's chosen her stage name. I wish her well, will always try to be in the front row when she performs. Also, I want her to know the reality of her ambition; there is *no* business like show business.

4. Paul Mazursky

This year the San Francisco Film Festival honored Paul Mazursky with a forum: a Sunday afternoon appearance on the stage in front of a sold-out house after 90 minutes of showing clips from his films: "I Love You, Alice B. Toklas" (1968), writer; "Bob and Carol and Ted and Alice" (1969), director and co-writer; "Alex in Wonderland" (1970), director and co-writer; "Blume in Love" (1973), director and writer; "Harry and Tonto" (1974), director and co-writer; "Next Stop, Greenwich Village" (1976), director and writer; the current and acclaimed "An Unmarried Woman," director and writer.

After all this the audience has at him, abetted by the urbane Mark Chase, associate director and official festival interlocutor, who's on the stage with him. The questions range across a winning triple-threat career. For, as well as being a successful writer and director, Paul Mazursky is an actor. That's where he started, in television in the '50s, then in supporting roles in features, in bit parts in some of his own films. And now he has just completed a picture shot in Vancouver, Canada, in which he co-stars with Donald Sutherland.

That his actors are good as people shows in his writing, and that, as a director, he is good with actors shows in his films. And certainly part of this can be credited to his own experience with the demanding art and craft. He called himself more sympathetic to actors' problems because of it, and perhaps not all directors share this attribute, "although the great ones know about it inherently on some

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Lawrence Sturhahn is our regular film correspondent. . . . Lucien Stryk is collecting his interviews into a book. . . . Neil Evernden teaches at York University, Ontario.

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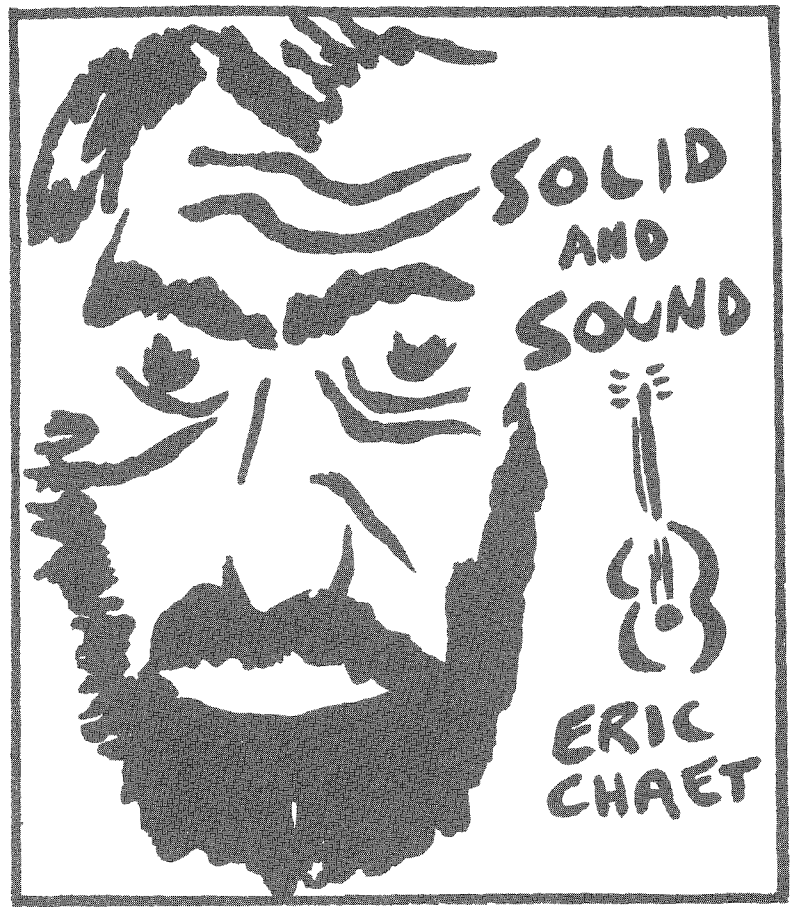
level. It's a tough and tricky thing—acting, and the people who do it need help from the director." Then, only half facetiously, he answers a question about helpful hints to the aspiring: "Don't do it unless you're insanely crazy, desperate, passionate—or just an egomaniac! It's very difficult—there's a lot of rejection . . . I don't think anybody should go near it unless they're possessed."

He is asked about "An Unmarried Woman," and talks about trying to get the deal to do it. Rejected at first by a nervous 20th Century Fox (which had produced for him before) because, apparently, they had three unreleased *women's* films, "Julia," "Turning Point," "Three Women," and they didn't know how the public was going to react to them, meaning whether they were going to make money. So Mazursky took his script other places and had some funny reactions. "Heh! Why didn't she go off with the guy at the end? Jeez! Have a happy ending, you know!" Then Fox opened two other pictures, "The Omen" and "Silent Movie," which did well, so he took it back there. Alan Ladd, Jr., said, "Sure, let's do it." Ten minutes it took on that go-round.

There's a lot of rejection in other things in show business besides acting. The road is not always paved with gold, even when you're on top. "Harry and Tonto" was turned down 14 times. Finally, it was the aforementioned Fox and Alan Ladd, Jr., who said yes, if it could be done for under a million dollars.

What Mazursky is trying to extol is the predicament ("You know our predicament is absurd!") of being human. "But," he said, "I'm inclined to see it optimistically, which is a paradox, of course." His style is to want technique to be invisible. "The easiest thing is to do a 360 degree shot with the camera." And the contemporary audience is very sophisticated, in the theatre you can hear high school kids muttering, "See—he stopped down. . ." Or: "What a shot!" Self-conscious camera work interrupts an audience's concentration with the stuff of the movie, Mazursky says, "I want the contact with the people (the actors), with the humanity. Which is not to say you can't blend the two—Coppola has done some wonderful blending."

"Alex" and "Greenwich Village" are reputed to be autobiographical,



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(signature) **Robley Wilson, Jr., Editor**

but he demurs. "The movies are just *there*, and I get what I get from them, you get what you get. 'Harry and Tonto' is as autobiographical as 'Greenwich Village,' it's just not there on the surface." His next project, "Willie and Phil," is to be shot two-thirds in New York, and the rest in Hollywood. Other than it being generally about two men and a woman over a period of eight years, he doesn't want to talk about it. "My main interest," Mazursky says, "is people, and always will be."

At the more exclusive (if not much more wise) press conference preceding the screening of the clips it was suggested that Fox is now producing Mazursky, Herzog, Bertolucci, Altman, and maybe that portends the art film becoming the commercial film. Again he demurs, saying that the industry has come to understand (again) that the good film can make it. "The art-thing is not the reason; it's if the picture can be made for a certain price." And if a first picture makes money, and/or there's something "bankable," the chances are the studios will finance the director's second project—and maybe his third.

Also the Europeans are coming here because it's not easy to get money there. They want to work here. After all, that's also history in Hollywood. In one of the halcyon periods, the '30s, there were Europeans working: Von Stroheim, Sternberg, Curtiz. Commercial-art-schmart! Mazursky thinks the labels are invalid. He doesn't exactly see Herzog and Bertolucci doing "Foul Play," but something more "sensible." An interesting word that, it means cognizant, keenly aware, conscious, capable of feeling and perceiving. As opposed to the alienation and superficiality that Americans are accused of.

Mazursky does not feel himself to be part of any Renaissance in film. "I'm here," he says, "alone—doing what I do . . . it's strange now, hard to pin down . . . there's less movies being made, and the tendency is to go with the new, leaving the old to languish. . . ."

Which isn't also Hollywood's history? D. W. Griffith languished in his later years, the last 17 of his life, unable to work. Then he died in relative obscurity in a town in which he was once king. An example of the infamous exploitation the industry is known for—perhaps? But as paradox is wont, it gets very complex. For, according to Alan Casty in *Development of Film* (Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1973), by these years the great Griffith had lost his sensibility to the times. And/or, as it does, the world had changed. Are the '70s anything at all like the '60s? Who today doesn't see the world with new eyes (for good or bad or both)? It is a different world.

Movies are a cruel and fascinating and exalting business, and there are really two parts to the American industry, Hollywood—and New York. Mazursky is among those American directors (Avildsen, Lumet, Kazan) who opt for that other because it's a real city while Hollywood is a movie place. "You can't go to the supermarket," Mazursky says, "without somebody giving you a script. Movies dominate reality all the time. The bag-boy knows the gross of your latest film."

I wonder about this when I remember the flat miles far south of the green lawns of Beverly Hills and the precipitous canyons above it, Gardena, Compton, Buena Park; the miles of tracts out east, between West Covina, Pomona, and San Bernardino; over the Hollywood Hills, the Valley. I wonder about that, but I know what he means. When you're a movie person in LA you only see movie people. But there are all those others. Perhaps the bedrock of the industry is not the stars and star-directors in the Polo Lounge, who come and go with the times, the whims, the changing tastes. Perhaps it is the technicians, the props and grips and electricians, the make-up and hairdressers, the assistant cameramen, the teamsters, who live in all those other places and commute to work in the studios, driving in on the frenzied freeways, like any other job.

The subject of Mazursky's film is life. His epiphanies are subtle, not the product of the special effects department, but the illumination of real incidents, youth and age, life and death. Like by the time this is printed the rains will have started here (we hope!), and the snows of winter elsewhere. There will have been death and birth, failure and success; that's the significant insignificant business of being human and moving through a life span for better and for worse. *–Lawrence Sturhahn*

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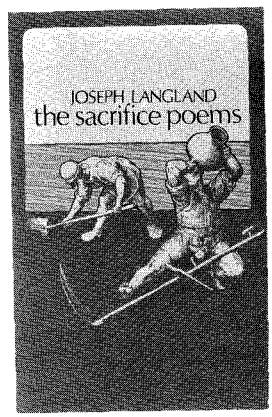

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